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SERMONS,

&c. &c.

VOL. I.



SERMONS

ON

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

68002

BY

WILLIAM HAWTAYNE,

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VOL. I.



London:

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,

AND SOLD BY J. STOCKDALE AND J. HATCHARD, PICCADILLY; F. AND C. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S-CHURCH YARD; AND BY BOWDERY AND KERBY, JUN. OXFORD-STREET.

1813.


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TO THE

INHABITANTS

OF THE

PARISH AND VILLAGE OF

ELSTREE.

I have addressed the following sheets to you, being willing to leave some testimony behind me to that faith which I have preach-

ed to you from conviction of its truth.

That what I have written is free from error, I cannot pretend. But as I have endeavoured to take the Scriptures for my guide, I trust that whatever error may be found, will not be prejudicial to your present peace of mind, or to your eternal happiness. And though the following Discourses may not be so conspicuous for solidity of judgment, or for correctness of language, or for regu-

larity of composition, as I would wish them to be, still they have been called for. That has led me to hope that they may have made some impression, and that they may not be altogether unworthy of public notice.

In the choice of my subjects, it will not have escaped your notice, that my attention has been directed to the service of the day; from which I have endeavoured to elucidate those parts of Scripture which had

been immediately brought before you. I will also confess that I have often made use of my observations in life. This will account for the frequent mention of thoughtlessness and incredulity; which have appeared to me to be the two great sources of irreligion, and consequently of great depravity. If people in general could be persuaded to *think*, and to establish in their minds a firm belief of the divine truths of the Scriptures, I am convinced that the world would wear a very different aspect. The

sacred volume has happily been distributed among you; and I am firmly persuaded, that if you will but use your utmost endeavours to follow the precepts contained in it, you will find enough within your immediate comprehension to give you lively hopes of God's mercy through Jesus Christ.

My great object has been to warn you against the prevalence of any doctrine of *faith* that is not productive of a holy and virtuous life.

"Without holiness," we are told, "no man shall see the Lord." And I am not afraid to say that your consciences will tell you whenever you depart from this rule. But to avoid any danger that may arise from trusting to this, let me remind you that there is scarcely an action of your lives, or even a thought of your hearts, concerning which you will not find clear and sufficient advice in the word of God. Let that be your guide. If Christ be your Lord and Master, obey his commands; else are

you not his servants. And above all things, let me awaken your attention to that remembrance which He has left of his love to you, by the institution of the Holy Sacrament. And as you would be holy, consider that as a means of holiness, ordained and strictly enjoined by Him. For more and more am I convinced, that a frequent participation in that acknowledgment of his meritorious death, would have a peculiar efficacy in enabling you to withstand the allurements of sin. "Submit yourselves

"therefore to God. Resist the devil,
"and he will flee from you; draw
"nigh to God, and He will draw
"nigh to you."

I take this opportunity of saying that I have given you the dictates of my own heart. To hope that I have succeeded in my sincere wishes to promote your happiness, would be among the greatest blessings I could enjoy. To God be the praise. I have only to intreat you to read the following pages carefully, and to ex-

amine the quotations from Scripture; which I trust will be the greatest help to your improvement.

Your faithful friend and servant,

THE AUTHOR.

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And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

They answered Him, we be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man. How sayest thou, ye shall be made free?

Jesus answered them, verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the son abideth ever.

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ERRATA.

Page 21, Note, line 5, *for* Αγγελος—*read* Αγγελος.
143, line 5, *for* enable—*read* enabled.
270, last line, And you will perceive it is, &c.
364, ditto, *for* peserved—*read* deserved.

SERMONS,

&c. &c.

SERMON I.

THE DANGER OF INCREDULITY.

PSALM 139, v. 6.

"*Such knowledge is too wonderful and*
"*excellent for me, I cannot attain*
"*unto it.*"

THE perversion of that sense and reason which God has given to man, has always been a glaring instance of the weakness and deceitfulness, the vanity

and presumption of the human heart. "Vain man," as we read in the Book of Job, ch. xi. 12. "would be wise," and not only wise, but wiser than the limits of his natural understanding will enable him to be. I am not one of those who love to decry the whole character of human nature, till they make it contemptible, and unworthy of the great and beneficent Creator. In a comparison between God and man, nothing indeed can be too low, too humble, for man to conceive of himself. But there cannot be any comparison, the very thought is absurd and impious, and therefore we must speak of man as he is. Gifted with extraordinary endowments, capable, in a certain degree, of knowing, and of adoring God, and of reflecting an appropriate degree of honour upon the hand that formed him; and by

that means ensuring to himself the blessing of God. But capable also of *dishonouring* his Maker, and of bringing a curse upon himself, and not a blessing. I speak the language of scripture, or I should hardly have ventured to use these terms of honour and dishonour upon such an occasion. — "Them that honour me," said God by the mouth of his holy prophet, "I will "honour, and they that despise me, shall "be lightly esteemed." "Whoso offereth "me thanks and praise, he honoureth me." (Ps. l. 23.) (1 Sam. ii. 30.)

Now among the several manifest proofs of that perversion of man's intellectual faculties, by which God, in the language of Scripture, is dishonoured; and by which the weakness and deceitfulness of the human heart is particularly displayed;

none perhaps is more obvious than the notion held by skeptics and infidels, the pretended lovers of reason and philosophy, that it is contrary to that reason which God has given them, to believe anything that they cannot fully comprehend. Nothing is at once more specious and delusive than a doctrine of this nature. For if this were really the case, the matter of religious faith is, I will not say, greatly circumscribed, but annihilated. And nothing is to be believed. Since nothing respecting the operations of God *can* be fully comprehended, by creatures so infinitely below him, and of, at present, such finite capacities as man. "Canst *thou* by search-"ing find out God?" As one of Job's friends appositely and sublimely observes. "Canst *thou* find out the Almighty unto "perfection? It is as high as heaven—

" What canst thou do? Deeper than Hell, —What canst thou know? (ch. xi. 7.) To imagine that we are not to believe anything that we cannot fully comprehend, will go, with a very little persuasion, to annihilate the very existence of God himself. It will effectually extinguish the light of the Scriptures; and by the same abuse of the understanding it is owing, that the Scriptures are disbelieved and disregarded; that all the errors in point of doctrine, and all the moral mischiefs of which mankind have shown themselves capable, have been falsely attributed to revealed religion. Whereas, if the truth were considered, it would appear, that one grand purport of revelation was to preclude erroneous doctrines, and to correct the evils of a depraved and licentious, and at the best, of an imperfect morality.

It is to the deception and danger of such language, that I mean to confine myself at present. And I am not making a question for the sake of answering it, — it is language, I am sorry to say on account of the rising generation, that is to be seen daily in print, and to be heard daily in conversation. To such pestilential authors; and to such careless talkers, I would recommend the remembrance of Christ's solemn admonition. "Woe unto the world," said he, "because of offences: for it must needs "be that offences come; but woe to that "man by whom the offence cometh." (Matt. xviii. 7.)

When the man of reading and study, who was asked what he thought of God, replied, that the more he considered the subject, the more obscure it became; he

did not on that account deny the existence and power of the Deity.* There are many circumstances, to the full comprehension of which our reason will not carry us; though that very reason will assure us of their truth. And the Royal Psalmist has given us a most sublime and beautiful example in the contemplation of God's power displayed in his own wonderful formation and nature.

"O Lord, thou hast searched me out, "and known me. Thou knowest my "down-sitting and mine up-rising; thou "understandest my thoughts long before."

* The story is told of more than one. Cicero relates it of Simonides, who deferred his answer, "*Quia, "quanto, inquit, diutiùs considero, tanto mihi res "videtur obscurior.*" De Naturâ Deorum.

" Thou art about my path, and about
" my bed; and spiest out all my ways.

" For lo, there is not a word in my
" tongue, but thou, Lord, knowest it alto-
" gether.

" Thou hast fashioned me behind, and
" before; and laid thine hand upon me.

" Such knowledge is too wonderful and
" excellent for me: I cannot attain unto
" it."

The king of Israel did not, with this acknowledgment, lay aside his conviction that himself and all the world were dependant upon an Almighty Creator. But his thoughts are further expanded to the

sure, though incomprehensible ubiquity or omnipresence and controul of the Deity.

"Whither shall I go then from thy "Spirit: or whither shall I go then from "thy presence?

"If I climb up into Heaven, thou art "there: if I go down to Hell, thou art "there also.

"If I take the wings of the morning; "and remain in the uttermost parts of the "sea;

"Even there also shall thy hand lead "me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

"If I say peradventure, the darkness

" shall cover me: then shall my night be
" turned to-day.

" Yea, the darkness is no darkness with
" thee, but the night is as clear as the day:
" the darkness and light to thee are both
" alike.

" For my reins are thine: thou hast co-
" vered me in my mother's womb.

" I will give thanks unto thee, for I am
" fearfully and wonderfully made: mar-
" vellous are thy works, and that my soul
" knoweth right well.

" My bones are not hid from thee:
" though I be made secretly, and fashioned
" beneath in the earth.

" Thine eyes did see my substance, yet
" being imperfect. And in thy book were
" all my members written.

" Which day by day were fashioned:
" when as yet there was none of them."

Now what was the consequence, the just inference and determination of this devotional rapture?

" How dear are thy counsels unto me,
" O God: O how great is the sum of
" them!

" Try me, O God, and seek the ground
" of my heart: prove me, and examine
" my thoughts.

" Look well if there be any way of

" wickedness in me; and lead me in the " way everlasting."

I have made this long and striking quotation, considering it as calculated to reconcile all the works of God; especially that most mighty, marvellous, and merciful work of redemption—and to stifle all those vain and feeble attempts of skepticism and infidelity, which seem intended to bring down the power of God to a level with human reason and understanding. And I would apply what I am saying to those truths which are offered to our reception by the sacred writers.

With respect then to the doctrines of revealed religion, it is to be observed, that they are related as matters of fact; the relaters giving ample and undeniable tes-

timony that they spoke and wrote by divine authority. And indeed in very many instances, if not in all, the facts themselves, especially those concerning history, bear this indisputable testimony with them. It remains with *us* to determine how far we shall receive, or venture to reject them; above our comprehension, and above our reason as they often are, *though not contrary to it.* And although I would not immediately offer the concurrence of thousands, I may say of millions, as an argument why we should assent to them; I would nevertheless point out the influence which guided their minds, as a subject worthy of our most serious consideration.

What then shall we say of such men as Hale, Herbert, Strafford, Sidney, Boyle,

Addison, Locke, Nelson, Newton—to which may I venture to add as a churchman, the profoundly-learned, rational, and venerable Hooker*—with a host innumerable as the stars of heaven; whose reason and reflection led them, with the greatest humility and fervour, to acknowledge and to adore those unspeakable and glorious manifestations of God's power revealed in the Old Testament and in the Gospel of Jesus Christ; whilst they were ready to subscribe to the Psalmist's avowal, and say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful "and excellent for me; I cannot attain "unto it."

Perhaps in the conception of those modern philosophers who hold up human

* I have mentioned these names as being familiar.

reason as superior to the word of God, these pious Christians may be deemed mad—as Festus remarked of St. Paul—mistaken, and overwhelmed by bigotry, and superstition, and enthusiasm. But when we find that their principles, their lives, and their deaths, were every way correspondent with their *professions*; and that they had nothing that savoured of bigotry or superstition attached to their characters—we shall not suppose they were mad, or that they were mistaken; but we shall allow that with St. Paul they spoke from conviction; and under the same conviction too—and we shall give them credit for having left behind them, the words and the works of truth and soberness.

Difficult as it may be however, to sustain any argument against an example so

consonant with reason, as the example of those who have imbibed and fulfilled the duties of Christianity, as far as they were able, from a conviction of its truth; it is by no means my intention to hint that it is required of us to form our religious principles upon the example of others. Religion offers itself to the mind of every individual in a peculiar manner. And we are each of us individually at liberty, and indeed bound in duty, to determine upon our own principles and conduct, according to our matured and best-informed understanding; without any retrospect to the opinions of those who have gone before us, or without any bias of those who are our cotemporaries: since we shall have to answer individually for our principles and conduct before Him who made us. Reason must be admitted here as a

great assistant. But if reason is to carry us no farther than the bare acknowledgment of God, it will give no very extended proof of its exalted qualities. For in truth it requires no great stretch of reason, to look round at the universe, and acknowledge the contrivance and design of an Almighty Creator—eternal, invisible, incomprehensible, all-wise, all-good, *every where present.**

* There is a beautiful idea expressed upon the tomb of Sir Christopher Wren, who was buried in St. Paul's.

Lector, si monumentum requiris,
Circumspice ———

So might the sage have answered, who was asked, who, or what God was. And it was an ingenious definition that God and nature were the same thing. *Naturam esse Deum,* says Cicero. But Mr. Harris, in his elegant volume of philosophical arrangements,

Having arrived thus far, the mind of every rational creature will insensibly be lifted to reflections upon the obedience and the worship that must be indispensably due to so supreme a power. Here is a wider field for the exercise of reason. But here I must *premise*, that so much have the feebleness of human reason, and the deceitfulness of the human heart continually discovered themselves, as to prove the necessity, and thence the mercy, of a divine revelation. And here, also, I will venture to assert, that in the revelation which God has vouchsafed to give us,

expresses himself with more propriety and feeling, when he speaks of the works of nature as the *energies of God*. I think I see a striking difference between the conceptions of a Heathen and a Christian philosopher.

a degree of truth, of wisdom, and of mercy will be found, infinitely beyond the powers of the human mind to conceive, and yet in no one instance contrary to the justest notions it can form of unperverted reason: provided we will suffer our reasoning faculties to be subservient to the will and power of God.

In the books of the Old and New Testament, we shall perceive those evident tokens of providential care and government, which justify us in addressing God as our Almighty father and protector. We shall find an enumeration of events, in an historical point of view, greatly above human conception, and as greatly surpassing the utmost reach of human energy. We shall not only behold the "*Spirit* of God moving upon the face of

"the waters"—(Gen. i. 2.) and raising the glorious fabric of the world out of nothing, —but we shall behold the same *Spirit* constantly interfering with the affairs of men, and presiding over human conduct. We shall behold the same *Spirit* unfolding itself in prophecies, too palpably minute, and numbers of them already too undeniably fulfilled, to leave the possibility of a doubt,—if we make a proper use of our reason—respecting their divine inspiration.* We shall see the same *Spirit* enwrapt in a temporary human form—and placed in a visible state of existence by

* Read the history of the most celebrated nations and cities of the world; of Rome, of Babylon, of Nineveh, of Tyre, of Egypt, of Jerusalem, &c. &c. and read the prophecies respecting them. And consider the present state of the Jews.

its own divine energy, for the purpose of fulfilling the decrees of the great Creator.* To exemplify the beauty and perfection of holiness. To give mankind instruction in the most familiar and inviting manner. To display the efficacy of human virtue. To lay open the glories of immortality. And to appease the wrath of Heaven

* Melancthon speaks of Christ as "*Imago cogitatione Patris genita.*" And the language with which the production of this præternatural Being is described, is remarkably deserving of attention. "Και "αποκριθεις ο Αγγελος, ειπεν αυτη, Πνευμα αγιον επελευσεται "επι σε, και δυναμις υψιστου επισκιασει σοι· διο και το γεννωμενον "αγιον, κληθησεται Υιος Θεου." The translation is literal. "And the angel answered, and said unto her (Mary),— "the *Holy Ghost*—(the Holy Spirit of God) shall come "upon thee, and the *Power* of the highest shall over- "shadow thee: therefore that *Holy Thing* which shall "be born of thee, shall be called the son of God." (Luke i. 35.)

against a sinful world, by making such perfect atonement as alone would satisfy the justice of Heaven.

To the same *Spirit* must be ascribed the promulgation of the Christian religion by the means of the apostles, persons so incapable every way of themselves of producing such a work: even if we look no farther than to the unrivalled perfection of its morality. And to the same *Spirit* must we also ascribe the extraordinary exercise of piety and virtue which have continued to shine forth, and to display itself, in the lives of those, of all ranks and conditions, who have received the doctrines of the Gospel with sincerity and faith. (1 Cor. xii. 3.) And let me observe, that if these doctrines have their intended effect of producing mental peace and happiness through life, and to

the awful moment of our dissolution; their power is sufficiently exhibited, and reason may well be satisfied.

In all this we discern, or *may* discern, the "diversities of gifts, the differences of "administrations, and the diversities of "operations," of God's Holy Spirit. And if we add St. Paul's remark that "it is the same God who worketh all in all."—(1 Cor. xii. 4, &c.) What is there so contrary to reason? What is there so opposite to the highest principles of wisdom, justice, and mercy, to which a reasonable mind may not subscribe, if we will only allow ourselves to bend and subjugate our reason to the power of the Almighty Creator? "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"—(Gen. xviii. 14.) "Is the Lord's hand shortened at all, that it cannot re-

deem? Or has He no power to deliver?" (Isa. l. 2.) Or is it the vanity of the human heart, which shall tempt us to think that we either *can* or *ought to* be thoroughly acquainted with all the secret workings of Omnipotence. Surely it can be nothing less than the very perversion of reason, to entertain a notion so inapplicable to any natural power that we possess, however great it may be. We are only called upon to admit the facts—the means we shall never be able to unravel, at least whilst "we only know but in part, and "continue but to see through a glass "darkly." (1 Cor. xiii. 9, 12.) And let the proudest, or the most richly-furnished mind but turn itself to the serious contemplation of any the smallest production of nature, or manifest work of God; with a view of reducing it within the limits of

human comprehension, and it will be constrained to acknowledge with the devout Psalmist—"Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me; I cannot attain unto it." It will be no proof, I repeat, of reason or of philosophy, to deny the source from which it sprung, upon no better argument than this. And, in fact, if God's dealings with us were less wonderful and excellent than they are, their dignity might be diminished, and their truth assailable.

Let me intreat you to meditate upon these suggestions, and apply them to salvation, and to the atonement made by Jesus Christ. It is a subject too interesting to be treated with indifference. Let it not, therefore, be heard with coldness or disdain, nor put at a distance with

supercilious contempt, by creatures who have nothing they can call their own; except it is their blindness and depravity —whose thread of existence hangs, minute after minute, upon the Almighty, invisible, incomprehensible power that willed and called it into action; and whose eternal happiness wholly depends upon the same Almighty Redeemer.

"And now unto Him that is able to "keep you from falling, and to present "you faultless before the presence of his "glory with exceeding joy. To the only "wise God our Saviour, be glory and ma- "jesty, dominion and power, both now "and for ever." (Jude v. 24, 25.)

SERMON II.

IMMEDIATE DELIVERANCE FROM SIN, GROUNDED UPON THE TRUTH OF CHRIST'S CHARACTER.

JOHN viii. 30, AND FOLLOWING VERSES.

" *As he spake these words, many belie-*
" *ved on him.*

" *Then said Jesus to those Jews who*
" *believed on Him, if ye continue in*
" *my word, then are ye my disciples*
" *indeed.*

" *And ye shall know the truth, and the*
" *truth shall make you free.*

" They answered Him, we be Abraham's
" seed, and were never in bondage to
" any man. How sayest thou, ye
" shall be made free?

" Jesus answered them, verily, verily, I
" say unto you, whosoever committeth
" sin, is the servant of sin. And
" the servant abideth not in the house
" for ever, but the son abideth ever.

" If the son therefore shall make you
" free, ye shall be free indeed."

To be free from sin, is a state to which no human being can pretend. Nothing is more certain, or more clear, than the acknowledgment which we hear so often. " If we say that we have no sin, we de-" ceive ourselves; and the truth is not in

" us." (1 John i. 8.) "The Scripture," as St. Paul writes to the Galatians, " hath " concluded all under sin; that the pro- " mise by faith of Jesus Christ, might be " given to them that believe." (ch. iii. 22.) Which is as much as to say, that they who receive the gospel must necessarily acknowledge themselves sinners; otherwise there would have been no need of a mediator or redeemer: which is the most prominent doctrine of the gospel. And since I have mentioned the subject, let me put one question in favour of the truth of the gospel, and that is, can any man of reason imagine, that the notion of a universal redeemer would ever have entered the head of any human being? The very circumstance itself, considering it in every possible point of view, is a plain proof to me that the doctrine is of God.

To believe then that obedience is due to God from rational creatures, and surely there is no rational creature that will deny it—And to suppose a freedom from sin, or a state of innocence, is perfectly inconsistent. Since no obedience of a fallible creature can be complete, nor can it therefore be efficient. To be free, therefore, I repeat, from sin, is a state to which no human being, possessed of reason, or of common sense, can pretend. The Scriptures speak of it as an impossibility.

But, to be freed, or exonerated, from the burden, or from the consequences of sin, is a blessing for which all men may hope; and a blessing which God has vouchsafed to all men. It is the chief blessing which He has propounded to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And upon

this privilege of Christianity I mean to address you. It is contained in the words of the text, as well as the means by which it is to be sought for.

The doctrine which I principally wish to establish, is, that by accepting and obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are now in this life freed and delivered from the guilt and punishment of sin, and made heirs of eternal happiness and glory.

Short of this, I know not what conceptions we can entertain of Christianity, or of any religion—or what influence that, or any religious principles can have upon our minds and lives. For if we think, that to go on through a long life, or to pass the whole of our life, be it long or short, regardless of God, and indifferent to any

religious impositions—giving a loose rein to our appetites and passions, and following the dictates of ungovernable desires—and imagine that a momentary repentance, or a faint and momentary petition for mercy, at the close of such a life, will efface the sinfulness and folly of it.—I know not upon what principles of reason such a religious persuasion can be justified. If this is not what the Scripture calls "making a "mock at sin, and mocking God," and putting his counsel, as well as our own reason at defiance, I know not what is.

If then reason should convince us that repentance is at all necessary—or if by this; or by confession, or by any act of religious worship, we should think to obtain the favour of God, and eternal happiness; I cannot devise any argument that

can reasonably be used in support of a moment's delay. I think I could cut it short, by adverting to the undeniable uncertainty of a moment's existence beyond the present. Besides, what can we think of any religious duties, or of the rigid morality that is inculcated in the gospel, if it is not to form the constant practice of our lives? And if these duties and virtues I have mentioned, are therefore to be exercised now, in the present time—in the full vigour and enjoyment of life, it is as reasonable to conclude that the effects of them will also be experienced at present. That is to say, that repentance and obedience will be immediately accompanied by a deliverance from the yoke and bondage of sin, or from the consequences of sin. This, I think is a great part of that faith to which we are called by the gospel of

Jesus Christ. I now proceed in my endeavours to show that it is so.

Upon the preaching of Jesus, many of the Jews believed on him. As we are told in another place, that "many believed in "his name, when they saw the miracles "which he did." (John ii. 23.) This is an indisputable fact. And it would be a loss of time to prove a circumstance so well known. I go on therefore to the promises made to this belief. "Then "said Jesus to those Jews who believed "on him, if ye continue* in my word, then "are ye my disciples indeed. And ye "shall know the truth; and the truth "shall make you free."

The Jews seem entirely to have misun-

* Εαν υμεις μεινητε.

derstood the expression of being made free. And "they answered him, we be "Abraham's seed, and were never in "bondage to any man: how sayest thou, "ye shall be made free?" they prided themselves upon being the descendants of a free and illustrious progenitor. And so far they said true. But that they, or that their nation had never been in bondage to any man, was far from being true. For they had been subjugated and carried into captivity by the Egyptians, and by the Babylonians, and were at that time tributary to the Romans. This however is an accidental servitude, of a public and political nature; very different from what we in general mean by what may be called an habitual slavery. Our Lord did not allude to any slavery or to a freedom of this kind. He spoke of a slavery of the

mind—and of a freedom from the bondage and tyranny of sinful dispositions and habits: which may be applied to nations or to individuals, in whatever state or condition their outward circumstances may be. This appears from his immediate reply to them. "Jesus answered them, "verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever "committeth sin, is the servant of sin. "And the servant abideth not in the house "for ever; but the son abideth ever. If "therefore the son shall make you free, "ye shall be free indeed. I know," as he adds afterwards, "that ye are Abraham's "seed," that is according to the flesh, or to the lineal descent of consanguinity; but "if ye were Abraham's children," if ye inherited the good qualities—the faith and the piety of Abraham, and were his chil-

dren in this sense, "ye would do the "works of Abraham." (v. 37, 39.)

They who are the servants or the slaves of sin, who are under the direction and dominion of vicious and sinful dispositions, can have no settled resting or abiding place any where. They can have no established hopes of happiness or safety even in this world—much less can they have any expectations of an inhabitancy in the kingdom of Heaven.

But if the son, if the heir himself, the Lord of the house, who hath all things at his disposal—if *He* shall deliver them from this destructive state of bondage, they shall be free indeed—with him they shall become sons and heirs of an eternal inheritance, and shall abide for ever.

As long as the Jews considered themselves as the descendants of Abraham, so far as to depend upon the privileges and promises granted and made by God to that patriarch, but refusing to acknowledge that those promises were fulfilled and made good in the person of Jesus Christ, they were not only in bondage to sin, for which no other peace-offering or atonement was ultimately designed, but the sacrifice of Christ; but they were also in bondage to that law of works which St. Paul calls a curse, as condemning "every one that "continueth not in all things which are "written in the Book of the Law, to do "them." But "from the curse of the "law," he observes, "Christ," not, *will* redeem—but "*hath* redeemed * us." (Gal. iii. 10, 13.) It is necessary to explain this

* Εξηγορασεν.

a little. For we cannot suppose that the law of righteousness, or of works, or that any law of God could be spoken of as a curse, abstractedly of itself—but the impossibility of paying a full and complete obedience to it in every respect, would naturally force it to act as a curse to all those who should proudly or blindly rest their hopes of eternal happiness upon their imperfect obedience, or upon their own imperfect righteousness. Hence it is said, "that no man is justified by the law in the "sight of God; it is evident: for the just "shall live," not by their own righteousness, but "by faith." (Gal. iii. 11.) By faith in the pardon of God, through Jesus Christ.

That they then who accept the gospel of Christ—who believe in it, and depend

upon it, so as to make it the rule of their lives, and the foundation of their future hopes, shall at once, I mean now, in this life, be delivered from the danger of sin—shall have their pious and upright endeavours strengthened—their minds assisted and illumined—and the truth made more and more apparent to them, is a doctrine that appears to be established by innumerable passages in the holy Scriptures.

But it is not the bare believing, it is not simply the acknowledgment of Christ as the Messiah or Saviour, that will effect so gracious and merciful a purpose. It is not our assuming or bearing the nominal appellation of Christians, that will entitle us to the blessings and benefits of Christ's religion. For as the apostle St. Paul remarks, "they are not all Israel, who are

" of Israel." (Rom. ix: 6.) So neither are they all disciples and servants of Christ who are called after his name. But it is the embracing and professing the doctrines of Christianity with a belief and warmth of affection and gratitude, as shall lead us to obey them as far as we are able; that shall rank us among the heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. " If ye *continue* " in my word," said he, " then are ye my " disciples indeed. And ye shall know " the truth; and the truth shall make you " free. My doctrine," as he said upon another occasion, " is not mine, but his " that sent me. If any man will do his " will, he shall know of the doctrine, " whether it be of God, or whether I " speak of myself." (John vii. 17.) These are promises, proceeding from the fountain of truth, and certainly attached to this

present life. And they are descriptive of that help from above which God will give to them who seek it with earnestness and sincerity. And let me suggest to you, that till we do this with an honest and good heart, we can have no right, upon any plausible argument of reason, to reject or to doubt the truth of God's holy word. Because whilst we are in ignorance of what that word contains, and of the testimonies upon which the truth of it is founded; and whilst we neglect the use of those means which God has pointed out for making ourselves acquainted either with one or the other—we cannot be competent to form any judgment or opinion concerning it. Upon this principle we are taught to "ask, and it shall be given us—"to seek, and we shall find—to knock, "and it shall be opened unto us." (Matt.

vii. 7.) "For the Lord God is a light "and defence," says the Psalmist. "The "Lord will give grace and worship, and "no good thing will He withhold from "them that lead a godly life." (Ps. lxxxiv. 12.) And again,—"Gracious and righte- "ous is the Lord; therefore will He "teach sinners in the way. Them that "are meek shall He guide in judgment: "and such as are gentle, them shall He "teach his way. All the paths of the "Lord are mercy and truth; unto such "as keep his covenant, and his testimo- "nies. What man is he that feareth the "Lord; him shall He teach in the way "that he shall choose." (Ps. xxv. 7, 8, 9, 11.) Thus our Lord, immediately upon the subject of spiritual blessings, makes the following promise. "He that hath my com- "mandments, and keepeth them, he it is

" that loveth me; and he that loveth me,
" shall be loved of my father; and I will
" love him, and will *manifest* myself to
" him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot,
" Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest
" thyself to us, and not unto the world?
" Jesus answered and said unto him, if a
" man love me, he will keep my words:
" and my father will love him, and *we will*
" *come unto him, and make our abode with*
" *him*," (John xiv. 21, &c.)

Thus St. Paul, reminding the Church at Corinth of certain notoriously sinful characters, remarks—" And such *were* " some of you; but ye *are* washed"—or rather, as a late celebrated writer* amends it; ye *have been* washed—" but ye *have*

* Mr. Mant's Bampton Lectures.

" *been* sanctified, but ye *have been* justified,
" in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by
" the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. vi. 11.)

Thus again, the same apostle writes to the Ephesians upon a like subject. " For
" ye *were* sometimes darkness; but now,
" (having heard and accepted the gospel)
" *are* ye light in the Lord: walk as chil-
" dren of light." (ch. v. 8.) Again to the Corinthians—" Moreover, brethren, I de-
" clare unto you the gospel which I
" preached unto you, which also ye have
" received, and wherein ye stand. By
" which also ye *are saved*, if ye keep in
" memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." (1 Cor. xv. 1, 2.) Again to the Romans—" For sin
" shall not have dominion over you, for ye
" are not under the law, but under grace.
" But God be thanked, that ye were the

" servants of sin,"—*that* is past—" but ye " have obeyed from the heart that form of " doctrine which was delivered to you. " *Being* then *made free from sin*, ye be- " came the servants of righteousness." " (ch. vi. 18.) I will add but one more assertion of Christ's to the same purpose. " Verily I say unto you, there is no man " that hath left house, or parents, or " brethren, or wife, or children, for the " kingdom of God's sake, who shall not " receive manifold more *in this present* " *time*; and in the world to come, life " everlasting." (Luke xviii. 29, 30.) To this we may add the frequent instances in which forgiveness of sins is pronounced by Christ and his apostles, to those who accepted the gospel.*

* Matt. ix. 2. Mark iv. 12. Luke vii. 47, 48. 1 John ii. 12, &c. &c.

These are all expressions, with many others of the same kind, clearly appertaining to the present life, and declaratory of those blessings, both temporal and spiritual, which, with the limitations and restrictions inseparable from the present state of things, shall immediately follow the reception and obedience of the gospel doctrine. And I trust they are sufficient to prove that they constitute a great part of that faith to which we are called by the gospel. "If then the son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

I am aware that much of what I have advanced, has been applied by some, exclusively to baptism. But I can no where find, whatever may be the privileges and blessings annexed to that holy rite—

that they were designed to exempt us from an actual obedience to the doctrines and precepts of that God and Saviour, in whose name those blessings were conferred upon us. It appears on the contrary, to be an awful and a most important truth, by no means to be concealed, that the privileges of baptism may be forfeited. But if the conditions of our baptismal covenant are observed, then may we hope, and humbly trust, that the grace of God will uphold us *now;* and that the death of Christ, to the merits of which we *have been* admitted, will have its effect in our deliverance from the power of sin, and from the punishment due to it. "Know ye not," says St. Paul, "that as many of us "as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were "baptized into his death! Therefore we

" are buried with him by baptism into " death; that like as Christ was raised " up from the dead, by the glory of the fa- " ther, even so we also should walk in " newness of life." (Rom. vi. 3, 4.) We are constantly reminded of this essential doctrine, as often as the office of baptism is repeated. " Remembering always," as it is there sententiously and elegantly expressed, " that baptism doth represent " unto us our profession: which is, to fol- " low the example of our Saviour Christ, " and to be made like unto him. That as " he died, and rose again for us, so should " we who are baptized, die unto sin, and " rise again unto righteousness. Conti- " nually mortifying all our evil and corrupt " affections, and daily proceeding in all " virtue and godliness of living." And thus said Christ, " If ye *continue* in my

" word, then are ye my disciples indeed. " And ye shall know the truth, and the " truth shall make you free."

A religion offering such considerations to our notice, upon such authorities and testimonies as are attached to the gospel, surely calls for more than common attention from creatures possessed of understanding and reason.

It is not every person proclaiming himself to be a prophet, or a messenger from God, or a Saviour, who would gain my credit. But if I heard him speak with a dignity and authority as no man ever spoke—if I saw him do works, which no man ever did * — if I saw him heal the

* John vii. 31, 46. Matt. vii. 29. Mark i. 27.

sick with a touch, or with a word — if I saw him quell the tempestuous waves of the sea in the midst of a storm—if I saw him distribute five loaves among five thousand people—if I saw him recal the dead to life — and if I beheld the accomplishment, not only of predictions concerning him, but of his own predictions, I should then believe him to be præternatural; to be more than human. I should be convinced that he was commissioned and empowered by God, and should put full and implicit faith and confidence in his promises. This may be called madness, or enthusiasm, or superstition. But my reasoning faculties would convince me that I was fully justified in indulging such faith and confidence: and that it would be madness, and bigotry, and prejudice, to withhold it.

Such is the faith that the gospel exhorts us to put in Jesus Christ. And we have as good evidence that he lived upon the earth in the reigns of the Roman Emperors Augustus and Tiberius, that he wrought miracles, that he was crucified, dead, and buried, and that he rose from the dead, and ascended up into Heaven, as we have of the transactions of any person, or *of any character* of notoriety with which the history of the world has made us acquainted.

Let us then endeavour to inform ourselves, as far as we are able, and by whatever means we are able, of the truth of that doctrine, and of those principles of religion, which the Scriptures have laid before us. Let us take into our contemplation the history, and the whole scheme

of revelation. And then let us seriously ask ourselves the question, — whether we can reasonably resist it. If the professed lovers of truth and the lovers of wisdom would do this with earnestness, integrity, and candour, we should not see so many of those dangerous and pernicious examples which are almost daily obtruding themselves upon us. We should not hear the word of God accounted superstition, or its advocates accused of bigotry or hypocrisy. It would be extremely difficult, I think impossible, for a reasonable unprejudiced mind, to rid itself, to divest itself of the conviction, that the religion of Christ is true, even if a person should unhappily be inclined to do so. And let us apply these considerations immediately to ourselves. Let us consider the happiness that awaits us now in this life, and which,

in a great degree, must lay the foundation of that future happiness, which we shall all most probably at one time or other, be anxiously solicitous to obtain in a life to come. Let us consult the true dignity of our nature, which though it may be interrupted and overshadowed by frailty and error, is still of sufficient weight to raise us far above that carelessness, that indifference, that worse than apathy, that irreligion and vice, which, if not corrected in time, must plunge us into everlasting destruction.

It is a comfort to the sinner, to believe, that upon repentance and future trust in God's word, his pardon is immediately sealed. It is a comfort to believe that God will assist his sincere and upright endeavours. It is no less a comfort than an im-

portant admonition to all men to consider, that they have "a God at hand, as well "as a God afar off." (Jer. xxiii. 23.)

This is the doctrine that I have endeavoured to establish by proofs from Scripture. And indeed unless this doctrine be admitted, if to penitence and contrition we do not add the comforting persuasion that our sins *are* pardoned for the sake of Christ, it has been well observed, that the life of a penitent contrite sinner would be a life of misery and despair.*

* *Sed ad contritionem, hoc est, ad hos terrores, necesse est accedere consolationem, scilicet fidem, quæ statuat nobis remitti peccata propter Filium Dei, et tantæ misecordiæ agnitione rursus erigat nos, ne oppressi desperatione ruamus in æternum exitium. Nisi enim accederet fides, contritio fieret mors æterna.*

MELANCTHON.

And now to him who has promised that he will manifest himself to us,—to him who has promised that he will lead us into all truth,—to him, who has promised that he will in no wise cast out those that come unto him,—To God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, and thanksgiving now and for ever.

SERMON III.

ON PROPHECY.

2 PETER, i. 19

"We have also a more sure word of
"prophecy; whereunto ye do well that
"ye take heed, as unto a light that
"shineth in a dark place; until the
"day dawn, and the day-star arise
"in your hearts.

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy
"of the Scripture is of any private
"interpretation.

" *For the prophecy came not in old time*
" *by the will of man; but holy men*
" *of God spake as they were moved by*
" *the Holy Ghost.*"

In preaching to you the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it is my constant wish to remind you of its truth; and to endeavour to convince you, that it is what it expresses itself to be, — a divine and holy dispensation from God. It is this alone that gives validity to any of the doctrines it contains.

It is indeed true, as I lately observed to you, that the Gospel carries with it sufficient marks of its own authenticity. So much so, that it would be impossible for any person to read it, with the care and attention that a concern of such impor-

tance may well be thought to deserve, without being convinced that such a system of religion, as the books of the New Testament have laid before us, never could have been the production of any man, or any set of men, unassisted by the power of God. I am persuaded that the Gospel of Christ has this evidence initself.

What human being merely, would have ventured to use the language which Christ used? What human being merely, would have presumed to promise forgiveness of sins, nay, to forgive sins, and to promise everlasting life and happiness?* What number of proselytes or of converts would

* Mahomet, on the contrary, confesses *himself* to be a sinner, and proves *himself* a notorious one. See Sale's Koran, chap. 48 and 66.

he have had? Or is it possible to imagine that an imposture or a deception of that kind would have continued, and have expanded, as the religion of Christ has done, through such a series of years? It was a striking answer which the officers, whom the chief priests and Pharisees sent to take Jesus, gave as a reason for their forbearing to lay hands upon him. "Never "man," said they, "spake like this man." (John vii. 46.) "For he taught them," says "St. Matthew, as one having authority; "and not as the Scribes." (ch. vii. 29.)

This is a kind of argument that would present itself to every cordially-disposed mind upon reading the Gospel. An unprejudiced person would scarcely fail of being convinced, by turning such reflections in his mind, that the Gospel has its

origin and its support from God. It has been a frequent and just observation, that with a view to the sublimity and perfection of the doctrines contained in the Gospel, and the simplicity with which they are laid before us, nothing like it has ever appeared in the world.*

But we are not left to deductions of this nature. The Gospel of Christ was recommended and established by miracles and prophecies. Both of them circumstances, that no sophistry, no argument, can possibly invalidate. For the truth of them both, particularly of the former, it may be said, that we are dependant upon the testimony of others. But then it is such various, such continued, and cor-

roborative testimony, that we can no more doubt, unless we are predetermined to doubt, than we can reject the testimony of any event with which the history of former ages has presented us. Let us keep in mind, that the chain of all history, both sacred and prophane, is closely and indissolubly linked together, from the present moment up to the remotest periods of the known world.

Can any other religion, or any other systems or notions of religion, or of religious worship, excepting the religion of Jesus Christ, pretend to show such supports in its favour?

And as to the strength of Prophecy, what man in his senses will venture to deny the truth of it, when he sees the ac-

complishment before his eyes? Many instances of this kind are afforded us by the holy Scriptures, in conjunction with the relations of those persons whose veracity upon mere worldly subjects is indisputable. And to this we may add the present state of that part of mankind, to which any particular allusion is made, and upon which we are capable of deciding by our own immediate knowledge.

It is therefore this sort of evidence that I cannot help feeling always strongly inclined to adopt, in support of those exhortations which it is my duty to offer you from time to time. It is indeed a method of teaching that seems the more desirable, as it will appear, upon several occasions, to have been one adopted by the Apostles in general; and St. Peter has given us an

example of it, or rather has adverted to it, upon the subject before us. "For we "have not followed cunningly-devised fa- "bles," says this Apostle, "when we "made known to you the power and com- "ing of our Lord Jesus Christ; but were "eye-witnesses of his majesty. For He "received from God the Father, honour "and glory, when there came such a voice "to Him from the excellent glory, this is "my beloved Son in whom I am well "pleased. And this voice which came "from Heaven, we heard, when we were "with Him in the holy mount." Alluding to the scene of the transfiguration as recorded in the 17th chap. of St Matthew, and in the 9th of St Mark. "We have "also," he adds, "a more sure word of "prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye "take heed, as unto a light that shineth

" in a dark place, until the day dawn,
" and the day-star arise in your hearts:
" knowing this first, that no prophecy of
" the Scriptures is of any private interpre-
" tation. For the prophecy came not in
" old time by the will of man; but holy
" men of God spake as they were moved
" by the Holy Ghost." I therefore mean
" at present to draw your attention to a very remarkable prophecy, as a proof of the truth of God's holy word, and consequently of that religion which is preached to you.

But before I proceed, I must be allowed to make an observation upon the nature of prophecy, which is such, that it cannot be understood, nor its merits decided, till the accomplishment is visible. Numbers have deceived themselves and

others, and have clouded and weakened the evidence for our holy religion contained in the Scriptures, by seeking for accomplishments; as if they themselves could be enabled to foresee the events. Whereas the truth of the prophet's inspiration is not to be ascertained till the prediction is evidently fulfilled. And then I should think it were impossible for a person of sense and reflection to doubt it. The following remark upon this subject, of one of the greatest men, and as zealous a Christian, deserves to be noted. "The folly "of interpreters," says Sir Isaac Newton, speaking of the Book of St John's Revelation, "the folly of interpreters has been, "to foretel times and things by this pro- "phecy, as if God designed to make *them* "prophets. By this rashness they have "not only exposed themselves, but brought

" the prophecy also into contempt. The " design of God was much otherwise. " He gave this, and the prophecies of the " Old Testament, not to gratify men's cu- " riosities, by enabling them to *foreknow-* " things, but that *after they were fulfilled,* " *they might be interpreted by the event;* " and *his own providence, not the interpre-* " *ters, be then manifested to the world.*"*

When the accomplishment of a prophecy is developed, then I conceive the power of God is sufficiently manifested. It would be difficult, in this case, to frame any argument for persons of hardened incredulity: they must be left to the great Searcher of hearts, the Disposer of all events. To them may be applied the

* Bishop Newton's Analysis of the Revelation.

words of Christ in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus,—" If they believe not " Moses and the Prophets, neither will " they be pursuaded, though one rose " from the dead." (Luke xvi. 31.)

I have yet another observation to make, which is, that prophecies are not always confined to the persons of those to whom the communication is immediately made; but that the fulfilment is often, nay almost always, extended to their posterity and descendants. Thus when Abraham was told that " in him all the nations should be blessed," (Gen. xii. 3. xviii. 18, &c.) The universal and obvious blessing was deferred to Christ, the universal Redeemer: whose genealogy or descent from Abraham has therefore been given us by

two of the Evangelists, St. Matthew and St. Luke.

I now go on with my intention, which I shall put into as few words as possible. It is the prophecy respecting the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. From whom have descended two of the most extraordinary nations upon the face of the earth,—the Ishmaelites, now known by the name of Arabians, or Arabs,—and the Israelites, who, since the Babylonish captivity, have been called the People of Judah, or Jews.

Ishmael was the son of Abraham by Hagar the bond-maid of Sarah.* Isaac was the ligitimate son of Abraham and

* Gen. xvi.

Sarah. And being the son with whom the covenant of God was made, and from whom the universal blessing to mankind was to proceed, he was called the Child of Promise.* Thus St. Paul observes in his epistle to the Galatians, which I mention merely to shew you the connection that is kept up between the Old Testament and the New, "It is written that Abraham "had two sons, the one by a bond-maid, "the other by a free woman. But he "who was of the bond-woman was born "after the flesh; but he of the free-"woman was by promise." (chap. iv. 22, 23.)

Abraham, however, so despaired of further issue after the birth of Ishmael,

* Gen. xvii. 12, &c.

that he puts up a prayer to God, and says, " O that Ishmael might live before " Thee." (Gen. xvii. 18.) That is, receive *him* into thy protection. " And " God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear " thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call " his name Isaac: and I will establish " my covenant with him, for an everlast- " ing covenant, and with his seed after " him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard " thee; behold, I have blessed him, and " will make him fruitful, and will mul- " tiply him exceedingly. Twelve princes " shall he beget, and I will make him a great " nation. But my covenant will I establish " with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear " unto thee, at this set time in the next " year.

It is my principal purpose to confine

myself to the descendants of Ishmael. For if the providence and determinations of God are shewn in one particular, and that in so striking a manner, as to combine the relations of all history, antient and modern, it may reasonably be thought sufficient to satisfy the humble and zealous searchers of truth, and to obviate the doubts of the incredulous.

Let us see then what was immediately predicted of Ishmael.

When Hagar, his mother, fled into the wilderness from the hard treatment of Sarah, the angel of the Lord met her; and after repeating the promise that her descendants should not be numbered for multitude, he says, "Behold, thou art "with child, and shalt bear a son, and

" shalt call his name Ishmael; because the " Lord hath heard thy affliction." (Gen. xvi. 10, &c.) For you are to understand, that proper names originally had some express meaning affixed to them. And the interpretation of Ishmael is, " God that hears." The angel proceeds, " And he will be a " wild man, his hand will be against " every man, and every man's hand against " him: and he shall dwell in the presence " of all his brethren."

The promise was again a third time repeated to Hagar, that God would make of Ishmael a great nation.* " And God " was with the lad, and he grew, and " dwelt in the wilderness; and became an " archer."

* Gen. xxi. 18, 20.

Such are the principal circumstances relating to Ishmael. And it would be impossible, and indeed tedious, to show you upon how many occasions, and in how many different ways, the descendants of Ishmael have been mentioned in history so as minutely to decypher the prediction. But I think it is enough to remark, that such is the situation—such the character and state of the Ishmaelites, or of their undoubted descendants the Arabs, at this present day.*

* It cannot be said of the very numerous and various inhabitants of the whole country of Arabia. But if a numerous body or race of people remain to answer the description, it is sufficient, I conceive, to substantiate the prophecy. And to this, the best histories bear ample testimony. They have been of late years, and are now spoken of under the title of Bedouines or Bedoweens. In short the Arabs will

They are spoken of in Scripture, and in prophane history, under the denominations of Hagarenes, from Hagar; of Bedowines, and of Scenites or Skenites, from their dwelling in the wilderness in tents, as the word Scenite implies; and shifting their habitations from place to place. They have also other names, such as Nabathæans, from Nebaioth a son of Ishmael; and Itureans, from Jetur, or Itur, another son; but they are the same people.* And to speak shortly of the circumstances in the order they are mentioned, the first thing predicted of Ishmael

in general answer the description. Mahomet or Mahummed was of this race; whilst Christ was as clearly descended from Isaac, with whom the covenant-blessing was established.

* They are also called Saracens.

" is, " Twelve princes shall he beget, and " I will make him a great nation." This was literally fulfilled. And in the 25th chap. of Genesis, we find the names of the twelve sons of Ishmael, who, as heads of families, according to the custom and language of the East, bore the title and character of Princes or Rulers. " These," says the history, " are the sons of Ishmael, and " these are their names, by their towns, " and by their castles; twelve Princes, " according to their names." And the Ishmaelites, or Arabs, are at this day a numerous and a formidable people. Divided, as the Israelites were, into twelve separate tribes or families, governed by their several heads or rulers.*

* These princes are called " Emirs or Sheiks," which signify Elders. The recent travels of Dr. Clarke

It was also said of Ishmael, "And he shall be a wild man"—fierce, warlike, unsociable, unsubjugated. "His hand shall "be against every man, and every man's "hand against him." And, notwithstanding this, "He shall dwell in the presence, "or in the neighbourhood of his brethren." (ch. xvi. 12.)

A great portion of the Arabs are now wild to a proverb—living in the wilderness and in tents, moving about from place to place, as fresh pasture becomes necessary; than which nothing can be more wild or unsociable. And so fierce and hostile are they in their manners, that they subsist in great measure by rapine, and plunder, and murder. So that travellers are

throw great light upon this subject. See his account of the Wahabees, Vol. ii. p. 491, &c. &c.

obliged to pass through their territory, in what is called caravans, or in great companies, for fear of being molested by them. Thus too literally their hand seems to be against every man, and every man's hand against them. Still have they continued in the same country, surrounded by their brethren. That is to say, by the different descendants of Abraham.

Of Ishmael too it was said, that "He "dwelt in the wilderness, and became an "archer." It is a minute circumstance. "But the same is no less true," says a writer from whom I have quoted, "of "his descendants. They inhabit the "same wilderness. And he became an "archer. Such were the Itureans, "whose bows and arrows are famous in "all authors. And such the Arabs have

"been from the beginning, and are at "this time. It was late before they ad- "mitted the use of fire arms among them, "the greater part are still strangers to "them; and still continue skilful ar "chers."*

Unsubdued also they remain, though various nations and people have conspired against them. To mention one instance—When Alexander the Great subverted the Persian Empire, and conquered Asia, the Arabs alone disdained to acknowledge him. Which, says the history, so provoked him, that he meditated an expedition against them: but death intervened, and put an end to his ambition and resentment. Thus they escaped, and thus have

* Newton's Prophecies.

they remained unconquered, in nearly the precise state of a prophecy, uttered thousands of years back.

This is one instance, showing how far or in what manner, the religion of Christ is to be vindicated by prophecy. And let me here take occasion to remark to you the reasonableness, propriety, and usefulness of continuing the perusal of the Old Testament as part of our religious observance. It is because it sets forth the unchangeable decrees and providence of God. It is on account of its indivisible connection with the Gospel. There are those who have inconsiderately asked what we have to do with Jewish laws, with Jewish ceremonies, or with the Jewish history. I answer, in the words of an apostle, "Much every way: chiefly

" because that unto them," that is, to the Jews, " were committed the oracles of " God." (Rom. iii. 2.) Because " they " are the people," as St. Paul writes to the Romans, " to whom pertaineth the " adoption, and the glory, and the cove- " nants, and the giving of the law, and " the service of God, and the promises. " Whose are the Fathers, and of whom " *concerning the flesh*, Christ came, who " is over all, God blessed for ever." (Rom. ix. 4, 5.)

The same inferences are to be drawn from the history of Isaac, and of various individuals, and nations, and people, according to the various prophecies respecting them, which were pronounced by those " Holy men of God, who," as St.

Peter says in my text, "spake as they "were moved by the Holy-Ghost."

And what shall we say to events so extraordinary, so striking, and so very important? The facts, I presume, are not to be denied—at least they never yet have been denied. What shall we say, or think, but that the power and providence of God have been clearly manifested? That the word of God is true, and that the religion of Christ, founded as it is upon this "sure word of prophecy," is also true? And if so, let us beware how we reject it. How we disregard it. How we disobey it! Let us rather look at the comfort to be derived from it, a comfort no where else to be found. For God is not a God of terror only. "God," says the Apostle, "is love." He is the per-

fection of love, of wisdom, and of mercy as well as of justice.

Let us look to the happiness which he has proposed to us in the religion of Christ. Let us use our utmost endeavours to acquaint ourselves with the doctrines contained in that religion. That we may be convinced how completely they are calculated to give us the full and rational enjoyment of this life, together with the sure hope of a glorious immortality. And let us learn to console ourselves with the well-grounded reflection that "every "word of God is pure," that "He is a "shield unto them that put their trust in "him." (Prov. xxx. 5.) And, "that no "prophecy of the Scripture is of any pri-"vate interpretation."

Hence, I repeat, are we to draw all our confidence. Hence are all the promises, and all the threats, all the hopes, and all the fears, which the religion of Christ has propounded to us, to be deemed valid. Hence is God brought nigh to us in all his glory, and Christ Jesus in all his redeeming power. There is no resisting, according to my comprehension, the testimony of prophecy: corroborated as that of Scripture is, by the undisputed chain of history through succeeding ages.

Such, my brethren, is the use which I would most humbly, and most zealously recommend you to make of the Holy Scriptures. Not looking upon them as a book fit only for the learned, or for any particular description of persons — not considering them to use the language of

St. Peter, as a compilation of "cunningly-devised fables," but remembering that they contain the inspired revelation of God's will. That they were written, and have been, I may say, miraculously preserved, for the purpose of "making us "wise unto salvation." Their truth has doubtless been their preservative. And the conviction, which they of themselves are capable of affording to every serious candid mind, will no doubt become the seal of their authenticity.

Give the subject, in your retirement, the consideration it deserves. It is a subject, above all others, not to be trifled with. Though men may mock, "God is "not mocked"—upon the truth of his word the essence of our religion, and the character of a Christian, depends.

Upon the mercy of God through Christ Jesus are we all exhorted to trust. Upon that mercy we shall all be inclined to trust, at that awful moment of our dissolution, when the arrogant presumption of human wisdom, compared with the wisdom of the Deity, will sink into nothing. When the broken reed of infidelity will be no longer able to support its blinded votaries. When the proud pharisee will be abased, and the humble believer in Christ Jesus will be exalted.

And God grant, that "As we have re-"ceived Christ Jesus the Lord, so may "we walk in him. Rooted, and built "up in Him, and stablished in the faith, "as we have been taught; abounding "therein with thanksgiving." (Col. ii. 6, 7.)

SERMON IV.

ON THE DIVINE POWER OF CHRIST.

JOHN i. 14.

"And the word was made flesh, and "dwelt among us, and we beheld his "glory; the glory as of the only "begotten of the father, full of "grace and truth."

IN order that religion may have a due influence upon our minds, so as to become the rule of our lives, and the foundation of our hopes beyond the grave, it is absolutely necessary that it be accepted, and

considered, as a concern of higher authority than any work proceeding from man.

The service of God is entirely of a spiritual nature, most particularly applying to the soul, or the mind, or the spiritual part of man—the seat of all his present happiness—the depository of all his future expectations.

Thus, for the supports—for the whole power—or for any essential effects of religion, we must look to a higher source than the feeble aids of human wisdom. We must look to him who created the soul, and who alone can hold any communication with it, or exercise any power over it.

Agreeably to this persuasion, in the re-

ligion with which we have been so superlatively blessed, it is our greatest happiness to be enabled to perceive, that the *power of God* is its most prominent and most undeniable feature. And in whatever degree the religion of Christ is seen to fail, in producing any of those effects which it is so visibly calculated to produce, there can be no other way of accounting for such failure, than by attributing it to that blindness or inattention in man, which will not suffer him to see, or to be constantly mindful, that it is of a *divine* and *spiritual* nature; and that its authority is from Heaven.

Religion, I fear, and with it the almost entire worship of God, is often lightly esteemed, and little regarded, because it is considered to be the work and contri-

vance of man. But there can be no unwarrantable boldness in pronouncing, that they who receive Christianity otherwise than as the dispensation of Almighty God, can be but little acquainted with the weakness of human nature, or with the history of revelation. If we are not persuaded that it is God who has spoken to us in the Scriptures, by the mouths of prophets, of Christ, and his apostles; and that the determination and means of eternal happiness rest solely with him—we shall be in danger of not rendering him a worship consistent with his nature, or our own. And in proportion as our minds are impressed with this awful and undeniable truth, will our lives be directed according to his holy word. Consequently upon this will our hopes of pardon, of reconciliation, and of eternal glory entirely

depend. It is to this important subject that I call your attention at present. Meaning to confine myself principally to the Gospel, with the subsequent writings of the apostles, and to the expressions thererelating to the divine character and power of Christ as our Saviour.

It was in a great measure to meet the various opinions of those, who did not deny this principle, but who formed different and erroneous notions concerning it, that St. John wrote his gospel. For that he was the author of that treatise to which his name is affixed, there is no doubt. Hence we may account for that peculiar emphasis which he lays, both in his gospel and in his epistles, upon the *spiritual communion* between God and Christ; and even between Christ and his disciples and

followers. We may also bear in mind, that he seems to have been particularly attached to his Lord and master; and to have been more the constant companion of Jesus than the other apostles. He ventures to stile himself "the disciple "whom Jesus loved." He, with Peter and James, were the only witnesses of Christ's transfiguration, and of his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. It was he who "leaned on Jesus' bosom" at the last supper—John xiii. 23. He alone of all the apostles, stood under the cross, and beheld the last scene of Christ's sufferings. And to him our Lord consigned the care of the blessed Virgin. St. John was among the first of those who ran to the vacant sepulchre from which Jesus had arisen—and who bears strong testimony to our Lord's appearance after his resurrection.

It may not be unserviceable to inform you, that we have undoubted reference to those who were not only the contemporaries, but the companions and disciples of this noted evangelist; and who have given their testimony to his labours.*

With this short mention of St. John's character, I proceed with my remark, that

* Eusebius Eccles. Hist. lib. iii. c. 22, 23, 36. Where mention is made of Ignatius who lived in the age of the evangelist; and of Polycarp, who is said to have been his disciple. St. John lived till about the third year of Trajan, and seventy years after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Irenæus, who died at the very beginning of the second century, is here said to have mentioned Polycarp as one who had received instruction from the apostles, was well acquainted with many who had seen Christ, and by the apostles was constituted bishop of Smyrna. See also Mede, Mosheim, &c. &c.

from his being called upon to refute some early errors of the Church, as well as from the peculiar intimacy with which he had been favoured by our blessed Saviour, we may account for his having particularly studied to enforce the divinity of Christ, and to relate those miracles and conversations which the other evangelists had omitted, and which had a more than common tendency to establish that doctrine.

I shall do little more than lay before you, as I have said, a few of those expressions of Scripture, corroborative of this tenet of the Christian faith.

Thus St. John opens his sublime treatise by speaking of Christ as the *word*. Comprehending, in that word itself, the whole essence of the wisdom, and power,

and mercy of God, which were so resplendently manifested to the world in the person of Jesus Christ.

"In the beginning was the *word*, and "the *word* was with God, and the *word* "was God. The same was in the begin- "ning with God. All things were made "by him, and without him was not any "thing made that was made. In him was "life—and the life was the light of man. "And the *word* was made flesh, and dwelt "among us, and we beheld his glory, the "glory as of the only-begotten of the "father, full of grace and truth."

So convinced was Nicodemus, a celebrated Jewish rabbi, that Christ was wholly actuated by the spirit of God, that he confesses to Jesus, "we know that

" thou art a teacher come from God; for " no man can do these miracles that thou " doest, except God be with him." (John iii. 2.) It is worth while to notice the strong presumption that this early confession of Nicodemus ended in his perfect conversion to the Christian faith. Since we are informed that he was one of those who brought spices for the embalming the body of Jesus previous to his burial. (ch. xix. 39.)

In conformity with this conviction of the Jewish ruler, that the spirit of God resided in Christ, and enabled him to accomplish the will, and so variously and conspicuously to show forth the glory of God the father, we may advert to, the manner in which, as St. Luke informs us, our Lord, at an early period of his minis-

tration, applied to himself a prophecy which will be found in the 61st chapter of Isaiah. "And he came to Nazareth," says the evangelist, "where he had been "brought up; and, as his custom was, he "went into the synagogue on the sabbath "day, and stood up to read. And there "was delivered unto him the book of the "prophet Esaias. And when he had "opened the book, he found the place "where it was written, the spirit of the "Lord is upon me, because he hath "anointed me to preach the Gospel to the "poor. He hath sent me to heal the "broken-hearted—to preach deliverance "to the captives, and recovering of sight "to the blind—to set at liberty them that "are bruised—to preach the acceptable "year of the Lord. And he closed the "book, and he gave it again to the minis-

" ter, and sat down. And the eyes of all " them that were in the synagogue were " fastened upon him. And he began to " say unto them, this day is this Scripture " fulfilled in your ears." (Luke iv. 16.) Thus affirming that the prophet had alluded to Him as being the Messiah, the anointed of God, upon whom the spirit of God rested, and in whom it dwelt, as in a tabernacle of his own immediate choosing and appointment.

To the same spirit of truth are we to ascribe those numerous declarations made by Christ, which are to be found throughout the gospel of St. John, relating to that union and equality which he had with the father. Such as—" For the Father loveth " the Son, and showeth him all things that " Himself doeth: and he will show him

" greater works than these, that ye may " marvel. For as the Father raiseth up " the dead, and quickeneth them, even so " the Son quickeneth whom he will. For " the Father judgeth no man, but hath " committed all judgment unto the Son; " that all men should honour the Son even " as they honour the Father. He that " honoureth not the Son, honoureth not " the father who hath sent him." (ch. v. 20, &c.)

To the man who had been born blind, and upon whom Jesus had conferred the blessing of sight, our Lord puts the following question. " Dost thou believe on " the Son of God? He answered and said, " who is he, Lord, that I might believe on " him? And Jesus said unto him, thou

" hast both seen him, and it is he that " talketh with thee." (ch. ix. 35.)

In the same strain of divine pre-eminence he replies to Thomas, who had put a question of apparent diffidence to him. " If ye had known me, ye should have " known my father also: and from hence- " forth ye know him, and have seen him. " Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the " Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith " unto him,—have I been so long time " with you, and yet hast thou not known " me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath " seen the father; and how sayest thou " then, show us the Father? Believest " thou not that I am in the father, and the " father in me? the words that I speak " unto you, I speak not of myself; but the " father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the

" works. Believe me, that I am in the
" father, and the father in me; or else be-
" lieve me for the very work's sake." (ch.
xiv. 7.)

Again, speaking of the incredulity of the Jews.—" He that hateth me, hateth
" my father also. If I had not done
" among them the works which none other
" man did, they had not had sin: but now
" they have both seen and hated both me
" and my father. But this cometh to pass,
" that the word might be fulfilled that is
" written in their law,—they hated me
" without a cause. But when the com-
" forter is come, whom I will send unto
" you from the father, even the spirit of
" truth, which proceedeth from the father,
" he shall testify of me." (ch. xv. 23, &c.)

Many other expressions of the same tendency might be adduced, but these I believe are some of the strongest used by Christ with reference to himself, and to that indivisible connection which he had with the father. I pass on therefore to the doctrines inculcated by St. John, and the other apostles, upon the same principle.

The beginning of St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews is very remarkable. "God, "who at sundry times, and in divers man- "ners spake in time past unto the fathers "by the prophets, hath, in these last days, "spoken unto us by his son. Whom he "hath appointed heir of all things. By "whom also he made the worlds. Who, "being the brightness of his glory, and "the *express image of his person*,* and up-

* Or, as the learned Dr. Whitby observes—the *cha-*

" holding all things by the word of his
" power, when he had by himself purged
" our sins, sat down on the right hand of
" the majesty on high. Being made so
" much better than the angels, as he hath
" by inheritance obtained a more excel-
" lent name than they. For unto which
" of the angels said he at any time, thou
" art my son, this day have I begotten
" thee? And again, I will be to him a
" Father, and he shall be to me a son.
" And again, when he bringeth in the first-
" begotten into the world, he saith, and
" let all the angels of God worship him.
" And of the angels he saith, who ma-
" keth his angels spirits, and his ministers

racter or representation of his subsistence, χαρακτηρ της υποστασεως αυτου—*the essence, or proof of his being or existence.*

" a flame of fire. But unto the son he
" saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever
" and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is
" the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast
" loved righteousness, and hated iniquity,
" therefore God, even thy God, hath
" anointed thee with the oil of gladness
" above thy fellows. And Thou, Lord,
" in the beginning, hast laid the founda-
" tion of the earth, and the heavens are
" the works of thy hands. They shall
" perish, but Thou remainest; and they
" all shall wax old as doth a garment;
" and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them
" up, and they shall be changed: but
" Thou art the same, and thy years shall
" not fail. But to which of the angels
" said he at any time, sit thou on my
" right hand, until I make thine enemies
" thy foot-stool. Are they not all minis-

" tering spirits sent forth to minister for
" them who shall be heirs of salvation?
" Therefore we ought to give the more
" earnest heed to the things which we
" have heard, lest at any time we should
" let them slip; for if the word spoken
" by angels was stedfast, and every trans-
" gression and disobedience received a
" just recompence of reward; how shall
" we escape, if we neglect so great sal-
" vation, which at the first began to be
" spoken by the Lord, and was confirm-
" ed unto us by them that heard him?
" God also bearing *them* witness both
" with signs and wonders, and with
" divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy
" Ghost, according to his own will?

In this quotation you will perceive, and I recommend it to your perusal, the allu-

sion that is kept up to that former Revelation which God made by his inspired ministers and prophets, and from which the apostle comes to those latter days, in which Christ himself, who, as he observes, "upheld all things by the word of "his power," spoke to the world by his own preaching. And he then directs our attention, as a further confirmation of the truth, to the testimony of the Apostles, as to those who heard the doctrine of the gospel from Christ himself. And who proved the truth of their own authority to teach, "by many signs and wonders, and "by the gifts of the Holy Ghost."

I pass over one or two repetitions I had marked, in which St. Paul and St. Peter speak of the worlds and the heavens, as having been framed by the *word* of God.

Because it would perhaps be a fruitless attempt to explain some of those things which, as our Lord said, though now covered, shall, in good time, be revealed.* It will, I trust, be sufficient to observe, that by the expression of the *word*, the strongest notion of God's will and power is conveyed to us. And therefore that Christ, in whom the power of God was so undeniably manifested, — "In whom," as St. Paul writes to the Colossians with a peculiar strength of expression, "dwelt all "the fulness of the godhead bodily," (chap. ii. 9.) was, by way of eminence, stiled the *word*.†

* Matt. x. 26. Heb. xi. 3. 2 Peter, iii. 5.

† Filius dicitur Imago et λογος. Est igitur *Imago cogitatione Patris genita*, quod ut aliquo modo con-

Thus St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, " But we preach Christ crucified, unto " the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto " the Greeks, foolishness. But unto them " that are called, both Jews and Greeks, " Christ the *Power of God*, and the " *Wisdom of God*." (1 Cor. i. 24.) And in conformity with the same doctrine, he observes to the same people " that all " things are of God, who hath reconciled " us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and " hath given to us the ministry of recon- " ciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ " reconciling the world unto himself: not " imputing their trespasses unto them,

siderari possit, à nostra mente exempla capiamus. Dicitur λογος, quia cogitatione generatur. Dicitur Imago, quia cogitatio est Imago rei cogitatæ. MELANCTHON: THEOLOGIA.

" and hath committed unto us the word " of reconciliation." (2 Cor. v. 18, &c.)

To the same purport, in his epistle to the Romans, mentioning the privileges attached to the Jewish nation, we read, " Whose are the Father's, and of whom, " as concerning the flesh," or as far as his human nature was concerned, " Christ " came; who is over all, God blessed for " ever." (chap. ix. 5.)

In his epistle to Timothy his opinion is as explicit. " And without controversy, " great is the mystery of Godliness. God " was manifest in the flesh — justified in " the spirit — seen of angels — preached " unto the Gentiles — believed on in the " world — received up into glory." (1 Tim. iii. 16.)

I close these evidences for the Christian faith, with the first sentence of St. John's first general epistle. "That which was "from the beginning, which we have "heard, which we have seen with our "eyes, which we have looked upon, and "our hands have handled, of the word "of life; (for the life was manifested, "and we have seen it, and bear witness, "and shew unto you that eternal life, "which was with the Father, and was "manifested unto us.) That which we "have seen and heard declare we unto "you, that ye also may have fellowship "with us: and truly our fellowship is "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus "Christ."

These are the passages, with many others of the same nature, to be found

throughout the Scriptures, which, by the proper and humble use of our mental faculties, in almost whatever degree we may possess those faculties, will lead us, by the Grace of God, to a persuasion, that the religion of Christ is a divine and spiritual dispensation. It is to this principle alone that we must look for that influence of religion upon our minds, which will enable us to enjoy all the comforts that the knowledge and love of God is capable of affording us. We hence may learn, not only the necessity, but the true end of piety and virtue, and the value of even that imperfect obedience which we may hope, through Christ, will be accepted at the throne of grace. We shall hence become sensible of God's love towards us, and shall perceive the wisdom of all his dispensations under the variable contin-

gences of the present life. Upon this principle, the fruits of patience, resignation, and contentment, become already within our reach. And above all, the blessings that are promised to repentance and faith, shine upon us in full splendour.

But all these, and all other temporal mercies, and all future expectations, will sink into nothing but mere images of fancy, if we build upon any other foundation than that of the apostles and prophets, of which Jesus Christ himself is the chief corner-stone. (Eph. ii. 20.)

No conceptions of our own, nor any doctrines of men, will furnish us with an efficient antidote to the evils and calamities of life, the greater part of which will be

found to proceed from sin and frailty. And in vain shall we look to the utmost efforts of human wisdom for the comfort of that "rod and staff," as the Psalmist figuratively expresses it, to which only we can reasonably look for support, as we "walk through the valley of the shadow "of death." (Ps. xxiii. 4.)

But in that heavenly communication between ourselves and the invisible author of our being, which the gospel of Christ has so powerfully and graciously opened to us, the soul will not fail to meet an object of reliance under all circumstances, sufficient to dispel the gloom of doubt, and to justify what the apostle calls "the full assurance of hope."

Let us then endeavour to impress our

minds with the truth of that religion which the Scriptures have laid before us. Let us be persuaded that in the gospel of Christ, the power and spirit of God is ever present with us. That it is this almighty spirit which speaks to us, and calls upon us to walk according to the will of that unerring wisdom which alone can make "all things work together for good," to them who confide in it. And God grant, that "we may be filled with the "knowledge of his will, in all wisdom, and "spiritual understanding. That we may "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of "our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "To him be glory, both now and for "ever." (Col. i. 9, 2 Pet. iii. 18.)

SERMON V.

THE BLESSINGS AND CONDITIONS OF THE GOSPEL COVENANT.

ROMANS i. 16, 17, 18.

" *For I am not ashamed of the gospel*
" *of Christ; for it is the power of*
" *God unto salvation: to every one*
" *that believeth, to the Jew first,*
" *and also to the Greek.*

" *For therein is the righteousness of*
" *God revealed from faith to faith,*
" *as it is written, the just shall live*
" *by faith.*

"*For the wrath of God is revealed*
"*from heaven against all ungodli-*
"*ness and unrighteousness of men*
"*who hold the truth in unrighteous-*
"*ness.*"

THE obligations of religion arise, in the first place, from a conviction of that total dependence of every part of the creation upon the Almighty Creator which is sufficiently evident.

They are also to be derived from becoming notions of the attributes of the Deity. Of that infinite power, wisdom, justice, and mercy, by which all things have been determined and established. There is enough apparent to the visible eye, and to the understanding of every

rational creature, to convince him that "with God all things are possible." (Matt. xix, 26.) And that in the elevated language of Scripture, "He is the rock—"his work is perfect—for all his ways "are judgment. A God of truth, and "without iniquity—just and right is He." (Deut. xxxii. 4.)

From what experience has taught us with regard to the management and concerns of this present life, we are enabled, in a great measure, to form a judgment of that provision which God has made for a future state of existence; and to gain sufficient confidence in what the Scriptures have revealed to us respecting such a state.

From these principles, I shall attempt

to lay before you some considerations upon the blessings and conditions of the gospel covenant. "The gospel of Christ," says St. Paul, "is the power of God "unto salvation, to every one that be- "lieveth; to the Jew first, and also to "the Greek,"—or Gentile.

The vast magnitude of the blessings attached to the gospel of Christ, which are comprehended under the term of salvation, is apparent, not only in the wonderful means by which those blessings have been proclaimed and effected; but also by the irresistable conviction that they are the determinations of God's power and mercy.

A rational creature, once subject to sin and to death, can find no means of being reconciled to God, and of promising him-

self everlasting happiness, if he should be tempted to reject those which are offered him in the gospel of Christ.

I presume that no man will pretend to say, or to think, that he is perfect—that he is utterly free from sin and folly. I conceive that no argument can be necessary as to this point, any more than to prove, that with respect to the difference that must and does exist in this case between the Creator and the creature; no comparison of our own lives with the lives of others can in any way be available or serviceable. Because as the apostle St. James acutely and undeniably argues, the law of righteousness is as completely broken by one failure as by many. His words are, and they perhaps may make it clearer, "Whosoever shall keep the whole

" law, and yet offend in one point, he is " guilty of all. For he that said, do not " commit adultery, said also, do not kill. " Now if thou commit no adultery, yet " if thou kill, thou art a transgressor of " the law." (chap. ii. 10, 11.) So that judging by any law of holiness and purity, we shall find ourselves obliged to acknowledge with St. Paul, " that every " mouth must be stopped; and that all " the world are become guilty before " God." (Rom. iii. 19.)

How then shall we expect, by any means in our own power, to pass from a life of great and visible imperfection, to say the least of it, to a life of immortality and glory? The utmost that any one can arrive at, will be doubt and uncertainty.

Sad companions at the solemn moment of dissolution!

If any one should venture to draw comfort from hope, it will be allowed that reasonable hope must have a foundation. For hope that has nothing to build upon, is a principle that has never been admitted by the wisest heathen philosophers. Some of whom have endeavoured to raise their system of eternal happiness, upon a degree of perfection to which no human being ever attained. What they have said is, that the perfection of what they called virtue, would insure happiness; or at least would substantiate the indulgence of hope. Hence have we what has been called by some "the chief good," and by others, "the consciousness of innocence?" But all I ask is, where such perfection is to

be found? or, to speak in the language of Scripture, "how *should* man be just "with God?" (Job. ix. 2.)

It is true indeed that the Scriptures speak frequently, and with the highest commendation of hope. St. Paul says, "we are saved by hope." (Rom. viii. 24.) But he, and the rest of the sacred writers, mean a hope that is rooted and established upon an implicit trust in the power, wisdom, justice, and mercy of God. Very different indeed is this hope, from any that the utmost wisdom or power of man independently can lead him to indulge.

"The virtue even of the best man," observes a celebrated Christian writer, "*must*, in order to appear *meritorious* at

"the great tribunal, have *something* added "ed to it, which man cannot bestow."* What is this *something*, but something that originates from God, since man cannot bestow it? What is it, but the will and power of God—the *merits* of an Almighty Redeemer—"the grace of "God that bringeth salvation"—as St. Paul writes to Titus—"and which hath "appeared to all men?" (Titus ii. 11.)

Hence a reflecting mind will easily be brought to acknowledge, that from the undeniable weakness and insufficiency of man, salvation is to be accepted as "a "free gift," (Rom. v. 15, &c. &c.) depending entirely upon the power, the mercy, and the truth of God. And thus the

* Dr. Beattie's Letters.

gospel of Christ, which has unfolded to us the means by which this gift has been imparted or conveyed to us, is justly said, by the apostle in the text, to be "the "power of God unto salvation."

By every circumstance connected with the gospel, the power and mercy of God are fully and sufficiently displayed. In the first place, by divulging a blessing to mankind so congenial with his nature as that of salvation. A blessing, for the assurance of which, he could not possibly devise any means of satisfaction; and from which he was altogether precluded by his great and numberless imperfections.

In the next place, the methods, or rather the arguments, by which the truth of the Gospel is to be maintained, suffici-

ently declare it to be the work and power of God. The fulfilment of prophecy—the performance of miracles—the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, sufficiently prove him to have been the Messiah—the chosen—the anointed of God—the Saviour of the world.

I might go on to the lives and doctrines of the holy apostles. Which appear so extraordinary, and so far beyond the reach of human attainment, or human developement, as to afford ample testimony to the existence of that divine spirit of inspiration, by which they were enabled to become witnesses of the truth of God's word. I might go still further, and direct your attention to the effects of Christ's religion, discoverable in the lives of good men, in all ages of the world, who have

been subject to its influence. Thus the Gospel carries with it the most evident marks of its own authenticity. And truly was it described, I repeat, by the Apostle, as being "the power of God unto salva-" tion." But it is the dictate of common-sense, no less than of the Gospel itself, that it can become so to those only who accept it.

Whoever is inclined to look up to God for salvation, and I trust that all who hear me are so inclined, must be content, and sufficiently humble to accept it upon the terms which God has been graciously pleased to propose to him. And of those terms we have no knowledge, but from the holy Scriptures. And especially from those of the New Testament.

The gospel proclaims, or rather I shall say unfolds, Christ as the author, or as the means, of salvation. And, as in this case, to accept is the same as to believe; to accept the gospel of Christ is to believe that through him we shall be saved. And that in his death we behold that atonement for sin by which the justice of God is to be completely satisfied with respect to all men.

Thus our Lord, in the Gospel, declared himself to be "the way, and the truth, "and the life." And to demonstrate the grounds upon which he assumed, and by which he supported so beneficial a character, he exhibited a power possessed by none but by the Deity himself. "We "know," said a famous ruler of the Jews, "that Thou art a teacher come

"from God; for no man can do these "miracles, that Thou doest, except God "were with him." (John iii. 2.) "What "manner of man is this," exclaimed his astonished disciples, "that even the winds "and the sea obey him?" (Matt. viii. 27.) "If," said he, "I do not the works of "my Father, believe me not; but if I do, "though ye believe not me, believe the "works; that ye may know, and believe, "that the Father is in me, and I in him." (John x. 37.)

To Christ then, or in the language of St. Paul, "through Christ to God-ward," is the faith of every Christian to be directed for salvation. And to the sincerity of this faith are the blessings and the promises of the Gospel chiefly attached. To two blind men who applied to Jesus for

relief, our Lord put the following question. "Believe ye that I am able to do "this? They said unto him, yea, Lord. "Then touched he their eyes, saying, "*according to your faith* be it unto you. "And their eyes were opened." (John ix. 28.) With regard to salvation, independent of the will of God, the whole world is blind. And if we hope to obtain it of Him, we must, I repeat, accept, and confide, or believe, in the means which He has mercifully appointed for that purpose. To reject these, is to run the fatal risk of loosing the object. "Believe ye that I "am able to do this," allows us to make the following deduction: unless you believe that I have power to grant what you ask, it is folly to ask it. Such is the nature of Christian faith. Again, upon the jailor's enquiry of St. Paul of "what

" must I do to be saved?" The Apostle's answer was, " Believe in the Lord Jesus " Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and " thy house." (Acts xvi. 30.)

Thus St. Paul begins his epistle to the Romans, that is, to converted Jews and Gentiles dwelling at Rome, by declaring how thankful he was to find, that their faith was spoken of " throughout the " whole world." He rejoiced to hear that so many had embraced the doctrines of the Gospel, and had given up that fearful and erroneous notion of depending for salvation upon that imperfect righteousness, which the Pharisees in particular maintained would be imputed to an obedience of the law. Meaning always, the law of works, whether ceremonial, judicial, or moral.

Here let me remind you, as some elucidation of what I have just said, that the obedience of every man *must* be imperfect. And therefore it is to be understood, that obedience of itself cannot entitle any one to hope for salvation. There must be *something*, as the writer I have already quoted, observes, "added to it." And that *something* is to be found no where, if not in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *There* is upheld the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ. Which, through the will and power of God, and according to the doctrines of that gospel, will be imputed to every one that believeth; "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

This seems to be the principal doctrine contained in this remarkable epistle, which well deserves our notice. This is the

faith so much extolled by St. Paul, and in which he gloried. "For I am not "ashamed," said he, "of the Gospel of "Christ." He had been enabled to conquer the folly and pride of man, which too often has led him to imagine, that he can sufficiently recommend himself to the eternal favour of God. The Apostle was convinced of the weakness of such a persuasion. And he was not ashamed of avowing his dependence upon the wisdom and mercy of God, rather than upon any power that could possibly be ascribed to the fallibility of human nature. "Yea, "doubtless," as he writes to the Philippians, "I count all things but loss, for "the excellency of the knowledge of "Christ Jesus our Lord; for whom I "have suffered the loss of all things, and "do count them but dross, so that I

"might win Christ, and be found in Him,
"not having mine own righteousness,
"which is of the law; but that which is
"through the faith of Christ—the righte-
"ousness which is of God through faith."
(chap. iii. 8.) St. Paul beheld, as every man must behold, who is at all acquainted with it, the divine power that is manifested through the whole system of Revelation.

The scheme of salvation may be said to be progressive. The doctrines of the Old and New Testament are strongly and inevitably connected. And the faith proposed to Christians, is of the same nature as that which was imputed for righteousness to Abraham. Namely, a firm and steady belief, and trust, in the wisdom, and mercy, and power of God. A faith

that shall lead us to obey his commandments, from a dependence upon his word, and out of gratitude for those blessings which are laid before us in the Gospel.

The determination of Abraham to slay his son, in whom the completion of the promises that were made him wholly rested, proved the sincerity of the Patriarch's faith and dependence. "He staggered "not," says St. Paul, "at the promise of "God through unbelief; but was strong "in faith, giving glory to God: and being "fully persuaded that what He had pro-"mised, He was able to perform. And "therefore it was imputed to him for "righteousness." (chap. v. 20.)

It is necessary for me to remark to you upon this occasion, in what manner the

apostle St. James comes to the same point, and that there is no disagreement between the two apostles, though they have taken a different view of the subject. St. James represents Abraham as being "justified "by his works, when he had offered "Isaac his son upon the altar." But he goes on, "Seest thou how faith wrought "with his works; *and by works was faith* "*made* perfect." (chap. ii. 21, 22.)

The inference I am bound to lay before you is, that in the same manner, it is the indispensable duty of every Christian to prove the sincerity of his faith in Christ by the holiness of his life. Or, in other words, by a strict obedience to the commands of his Lord and Master. Hence we shall be enabled to perceive, that the law of faith and righteousness has been

always the same. And by a proper and minute attention to the writings of the Old Testament, we shall discover that the doctrines of Christianity are there variously pourtrayed. And in how great a degree the assertion of Christ is verified, "that "he came not to destroy the law, but to "fulfil it." (Matt. v. 17.)

Thus in every way it must be acknowledged, that "the Gospel of Christ is the "power of God unto salvation. For "therein," the Apostle proceeds, "is the "righteousness of God revealed from "faith to faith:* as it is written, the just "shall live by faith." From the faith of the Jew, or of the Gentile, to that of the Christian. Or from the single act of be-

* Ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν.

lieving, to the farther persuasion of adding obedience to faith. And again, to the ultimate persuasion, that dependence upon God through Christ Jesus, accompanied by a conscientious discharge of gospel, or Christian duties, will insure salvation. And thus it is observed that the *just*, not the sinner, but the just, the pious, the pure, the upright, the charitable, the lover of God, and the friend of mankind—They, who, as Christ said "having heard "the word, keep it,"—these shall receive the reward of their faith—they shall be upheld now, and shall live for ever. "For the wrath of God," adds the Apostle, "is revealed from heaven against all "ungodliness of men, who hold the truth "in unrighteousness." With a few remarks upon this corroboration of what has al-

ready been said, I shall draw to a conclusion.

To hold the truth in unrighteousness, is perhaps not so much to pervert the sense of Scripture, as to sin against conviction. It is to believe, and to act contrary to your faith. And with respect more immediately to us Christians, it is to live in the commission of sin, while we acknowledge the truth of that Gospel which condemns every kind of wickedness. There can be no greater instance of criminality or folly than this. Nothing more contrary to the doctrines of Christ and his apostles. Nor is there anything more reprobated throughout the Scriptures: and yet, very far into this unfortunate and fatal error, many, I fear, have been led, by attending to the doctrine of

faith, as being all that is necessary to salvation.

It is true, that without faith, there can be no religion. "He that cometh to God, "must believe that He is, and that He is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek "Him." (Heb. xi. 6.) Thus faith is the very root, the foundation, the most indispensable quality of all religion. And so most indispensably necessary, as to leave all other things useless. Thus, by way of eminence, it may be said to be the only thing necessary. It is so most evidently with regard to that redemption for which we are taught to look through Christ Jesus; when compared with anything that we can do of ourselves. We cannot hope to be justified by our own works, because, as it has already been

observed, the best of those works are imperfect; and are besides mixed with other works of notorious sin and folly. So that as far as we can hope for salvation at all, it must be, as Christians, by depending upon God's mercy; and, as St. Paul expresses himself in this same epistle to the Romans, "upon the being justified freely "by his grace, through the redemption that "is in Christ Jesus." (chap. iii. 24.) And in this sense are we saved by faith alone.

But in vain shall we open any page of the Gospel, in search of a faith that will save us, in the midst of a life of iniquity. That blessed Lord and Saviour who said, "He that believeth in me, though "he were dead, yet shall he live; and "whosoever liveth and believeth in me, "shall never die,—(John xi. 25, 26.)—

has also assured us, that in vain shall we call unto Him, "Lord, Lord," that is, in vain shall we profess ourselves his servants, "unless we do the will "of our Father who is in Heaven." (Matt. vii 21.) And the same apostle St. Paul who writes to the Romans, "that a man is justified by faith, with-"out the deeds of the law," because those deeds of the law *cannot* justify him: writes also to the Corinthians, that "though I have all faith, so that I could "remove mountains; and have not chari-"ty — I am nothing." (1. Cor. xiii. 2.)

Nothing is indeed clearer, than that the gospel-covenant equally insists upon the condition of faith and holiness. To imagine otherwise, as this celebrated champion for Christianity assures the

Galatians, "to seek to be justified by "Christ, and to remain sinners, at the "same time, were to make Christ the "minister of sin." (chap. ii. 17.) Than which there cannot be a greater instance of impiety, atrociousness, and folly.

To conclude. Let us learn to be thankful to Almighty God, for that religion with which it has pleased him to bless us. A religion that, take it in every point of view, in which it can possible be considered, plainly discovers its divine origin. A religion for which, if other proofs were wanting, there is one, that in my humble opinion, would be sufficient to establish the truth of it. And that is, that if its doctrines were fully and implicitly received and obeyed, the most perfect happiness of which mankind is capable,

would be the unquestionable consequence. I do not mean to say that it would produce uninterrupted enjoyment; for of this, man is not capable. But if the mind of man can be instructed and enable to conquer the unavoidable evils of the present life, by bearing them with patience, with resignation, and even with contentment, and with the "full assurance "of hope."—(Heb. vi. 12.)—he will attain all the happiness of which his nature is susceptible. And this the gospel of Christ is abundantly calculated to accomplish. "Godliness," says St. Paul, "is "profitable unto all things: having pro- "mise of the life that now is, and of that "which is to come." (1 Tim. iv. 8.)

Let us take care how we think lightly of such unspeakable advantages. Let us

treat the subject with the seriousness and importance that belongs to it. And God grant, that so the Gospel of Christ may prove to us "the power of God unto "salvation," through the same blessed Lord and Saviour. To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, might, majesty, and dominion, for ever and ever.

SERMON VI.

THE GROUNDS AND CONSOLATION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH.

2 Tim. i. 12.

"*For I know in whom I have believed,*
"*and am persuaded that He is able*
"*to keep that which I have commit-*
"*ted unto Him, against that day.*"

St. Paul speaks with certainty of that hope and faith which he had in Christ Jesus as the Saviour of mankind. If we

consult the life of this great apostle, we shall have reason to believe, that his faith in Christ was the effect of inspiration. God manifested Himself to him in a miraculous manner—He influenced his heart and mind—He showed him his error—and called him from darkness to light, by the extraordinary exercise of his almighty power. There is no other way of accounting for St. Paul's sudden conversion. He was chosen, "called to be an apostle, se- "parated unto the Gospel of God." (Rom. i. 1.)—But this did not preclude him from making use of his own natural understanding. He has shown how thoroughly conversant he was with the writings of the Old Testament—He knew what the prophets had said concerning a Saviour—and doubtless he was well acquainted with every thing relating to the birth, the life, the doc-

trines, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ,—for he lived in the very age. But, like many others, of his own time, and of all times—he remained incredulous—bigotted to the opinions and prejudices of his own nation—and perhaps not a little infatuated by what he afterwards terms "the oppositions of science *falsely*, "*so called*,"* (1 Tim. vi. 20.) He alleges too, as other skeptics and bigots have alleged, that he had followed the dictates of conscience, and that he all along acted upon principle. He "verily thought," as he says of himself, "that he ought to do "many things contrary to the name of "Jesus Christ." (Acts xxvi. 9.)—Till at length, when it pleased God to convince

* Ψευδωνυμου γνωσεως.

him of his mistake, and to set the truth before him—he became as zealous an advocate for the Christian Religion, as he had been its determined enemy.

We may well imagine, that such a man as St. Paul appears to have been, would now direct all his abilities, and all his talents, to the support of his newly-excited conviction. And that to that "Help," which, as he expresses it, "he had so pe-"culiarly obtained of God;" (Acts xxvi. 22.) he added all the knowledge, and all the experience belonging to his former profession. These are the grounds upon which he asserts in the words of the text—"I "know in whom I have believed; and am "persuaded that He is able to keep that "which I have committed to Him against

"that day."—He means, his soul, which he had committed to the care of Christ, against the day of final retribution.*

In like manner does it behove us, my Christian brethren, not indeed supinely to wait with fanatical enthusiasm for miraculous conversions—but to pray for the enlightening help of God's grace, that we may be inclined and enabled to make a becoming use of those intellectual faculties and powers which He has already granted us—and that we may offer Him a pure and holy worship according to his holy word. Till we have done this, till we resort to these means, and make these efforts,—zealously and impartially, with warm hearts and unprejudiced minds, let us beware of

* Την παραθηκην μου.

rejecting the Gospel of Christ, or treating any of its doctrines with indifference.

What therefore is the task assigned us as rational creatures — and particularly as professors of a religion by which our everlasting fate is to be determined? What should be our employment — what greater proof can we give of our wisdom—or upon what more interesting subject can our vacant hours be occupied — exhorted as we are to believe in God through Jesus Christ—than in following the memorable example of the Jews of Berea, of whom it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, that "they searched the scriptures daily, "to see whether those things were so?" (ch. xvii. 11.)

Let me then endeavour to put two or

three principles together, which I hope may be understood and acknowledged by you.

The Omnipotent Creator and ruler of the universe is sufficiently manifest. None but a fool literally—none but a person void of understanding, incapable of thought and of reflection could say there was no God. This is one elementary principle of religion not to be denied.

In the next place, God, we are told, made man "in his own image" that is, as it is somewhat explained, "after his own "likeness." (Gen. i. 26.) And if man had retained his primitive state of innocence, that likeness would have continued unimpaired. Traces indeed, sufficiently strong to denote the meaning of the expres-

sion, are still visible in the extraordinary and incomprehensible powers of the human mind. But by the abuse of those powers, the human mind has become vitiated, and the divine similitude has been wofully defaced. This is another principle of religion hardly to be combated.

Further, that in the production of such a creature as man, as a necessary link in the wonderful chain of animal-existence, God purposely created a race of sinners, reason forbids us to imagine. That mankind was made capable of sinning, his whole history obliges us to acknowledge. And by the introduction of sin, innocence was destroyed, and all claims to happiness were forfeited. All that Solomon discovered in his various pursuits after knowledge, is truly depicted in the following words.

" Lo, this only have I found; that God " hath made man upright, but they have " sought out many inventions." (Eccles vii. 29.)

It can be of no use to us, to enquire why these things are so. It would be no increase to our comfort or to our happiness, if we knew why — " The secret things be- " long unto the Lord our God; but those " things which are revealed belong unto " us, and to our children for ever: that we " may do all the words of this law." (Deut. xxix. 39.) All that remains on our part, is humbly to acknowledge and to adore the wisdom and mercy of God; who, although He has suffered us to be liable to various temptations, " hath also made us a " way to escape." (1 Cor. x. 13.) Not merely from the temptation, but also from

those fatal consequences of yielding, to which our numerous frailties continually expose us.

St. Paul, as I have said, was well acquainted with the variety of prophecies and prefigurations respecting a Saviour. He knew that as soon as the innocence of man was forfeited, an antidote to the commission and to the guilt of sin was promised in the offspring of the woman;* who should be accepted as a mediator, and in his own person offer up an acceptable atonement. In the birth and death of Christ, St. Paul saw that verified. He perceived the intended effect of this atonement foretold and depictured in numerous sacrifices of the religious establishment by Moses. Sacrifices, which, in the opi-

* Gen. iii. 15.

nion of the Apostle, could have neither meaning nor value, but as the "Shadow "of good things to come — for," he adds, "it is not possible that the blood of bulls "and of goats should take away sins." (Heb. x. 1, 4.) But in Christ he saw the substance of these shadows — "Who," he observes, "through the eternal spirit, "offered Himself without spot to God, to "purge your conscience from dead works, "to serve the living God." (Heb. ix. 14.) He beheld the family from which this holy Mediator and victim was to proceed, marked out in a long series of prophecies, in language not to be mistaken, nor capable of being misapplied. In Christ he discovered the fulfilment of that promise mentioned in Isaiah, respecting "the sure "mercies of David," — from whom the descent of the Messiah is frequently noticed. (Isa. lv. 3. Acts, xiii. 34.) He

beheld the character and the power of the Saviour specifically delineated, and with an accuracy that would admit of no deception. And he found in Jesus Christ, a person undeniably answering the description of a great and promised Redeemer in every particular.

The Apostle also became thoroughly sensible of the depravity and weakness of his own nature. He felt the prevalence of sin, and the curse attending a distorted inclination. He acknowledged his incapacity to extricate himself from the foulness contracted in his very birth, and found himself totally without means of hoping or pretending to satisfy the justice of an offended God: even though he were zealously desirous of doing so. "I "know," said he, "that in me — that is,

" in my flesh — dwelleth no good thing:
" for to will is present with me; but how
" to perform that which is good, I find
" not. For I delight in the law of God
" after the inward man — but I see ano-
" ther law in my members, warring
" against the law of my mind, and bring-
" ing me into captivity to the law of sin,
" which is in my members. O wretch-
" ed man that I am, who shall deliver
" me from the body of this death? —
" I thank God (I shall be delivered)
" through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. vii. 18, 22, &c.)

However, notwithstanding what has been said concerning St. Paul's natural powers, and the knowledge which he had obtained respecting Christ as the promised Messiah or Saviour; it was clearly

his own opinion, as well as his constant acknowledgment, that the great influence upon his mind was the immediate effect of God's grace. "By the grace of God," said he, "I am what I am." (1 Cor. xv. 10, &c.) It was by this that he found himself enabled to preach the Gospel of Christ with a degree of success, of which otherwise he could not have entertained a hope — and to overcome all difficulties, which no human mind, unless so supported, could have been capable of effecting. "I can do "all things," as he writes to the Philippians, "through Christ, who strengthen- "eneth me." (ch. iv. 13.)

Now what are *we* to learn from the life and example of this great and justly-admired Apostle?

Not, as I have said, to wait, indolently or indifferently, for miraculous calls from Heaven, — or to look, upon every trifling occurrence, for præternatural support. Neither are we, on the other hand, to be coldly or incredulously regardless of that divine assistance, which is abundantly promised in the holy Scriptures to all who seek it; and who are happily disposed to confide in it. For without our own exertions, and strenuous exertions too — or without, I will say, an unlimited confidence, or, as we generally term it, without a full and implicit faith in the power and mercy of God, freely manifested and extended as they are through Jesus Christ; our religion can be expected to have but small influence over our present lives, or over our hopes respecting futurity. To turn the doctrines and the pro-

mises of the Gospel to advantage, so as to make our lives comfortable, and our deaths tranquil and glorious, is, I humbly conceive, the property of what we mean by faith and grace; and will be found, I trust, not far from, at least, a warrantable description of them.*

It is our duty then, as Christians, to learn what the word of God has taught us upon these important subjects: and to put in practice, as far as we are able, the lessons with which it has so variously furnished and admonished us. But we need hardly go to the Scriptures to be convinced of our own weakness, and of

Gratia propriè significat miserecordiam gratuitam, seu acceptationem gratuitam propter Christum. MELANCTHON.

our own utter incompetency to stand before the tribunal of an offended God, and to satisfy the demands of his justice. The Scriptures, as a history, show us, as indeed do all other histories, from all we know of the beginning of the world to the present moment, the imbecility and depravity of human nature. But no volume, except that which contains the Revelation of God's will, has pretended, with the smallest degree of plausibility, to unfold the means of counteracting that depravity, or to mark out a path to reconciliation with God, and to the recovery of lost innocence and happiness. No holy instructor, but one — no preacher of righteousness, but one — has ever ventured to affirm of Himself, as Christ did, "I am the way, and the truth, and "the life: no man cometh unto the

" Father, but by me." (John xiv. 6.) How has this happened amidst the vanity and presumption which make so glaring a feature in the history of mankind? Unless it is, because no one has been able to say also, as Christ said, " If I " do not the works of my Father, be- " lieve me not. But if I do, though " ye believe not me, believe the works; " that ye may know, and believe, that " the Father is in me, and I in Him." (John x. 37, 38.) And again, speaking of Jewish incredulity, " If I had not done " among them, the works which none " other man did, they had not had sin: " but now have they both seen and hated " both me and my Father." (Ib. xv. 24.) And thus, whilst the Scriptures have set before us the corrupted state of the human mind, they alone have unveiled to us the

possibility of our being cleansed and justified by the meritorious sacrifice of Jesus Christ our great and holy Redeemer. They alone have taught us, in the language of St. Paul to the Romans, that "as by one man's disobedience many "were made sinners; so by the obedience "of one, shall many be made righteous." (ch. v. 19.) "But not," as indeed we may say with the same Apostle, "not as "the offence, so also is the free gift." (Ib. v. 15.) Since the mercy of God so far exceeds our frailty or the power of our imagination.

It surely may be thought unbecoming us, as rational creatures, to be negligent of our salvation, or to remain wilfully ignorant of that provision which God has made for it. In the concerns of

this life, nothing is received as a greater testimony of a man's understanding, than the assiduity and perseverance which he is seen to bestow upon his temporal interests. His exertions in the acquiring information and knowledge, and his prudence and industry in the use of them, are deemed highly laudable; and justly so. But surely the prospect of Eternity may also be deemed worthy of some place in his thoughts, and the securing a happy eternity may reasonably be allowed to deserve some pains. And I would leave it for any man of sense and reason to determine, which of the two has the first claim to his care and attention. I should not fear the result of my proposition, if he deserved the character of a rational reflecting Being.

Nevertheless there are some, who seem to act, and who speak, as if they thought it the greatest proof of their reason, to attempt to be wiser than God; and who call it philosophy to shut their eyes against that spiritual light which the Scriptures have afforded them. This is what St. Paul describes as "the "oppositions of science *falsely so called*," "which, some," he adds, "professing, "have erred concerning the faith." For nothing is more true than the affirmation of the Prophet Isaiah, that so wide is the distance—so great is the difference between the thoughts of God and our thoughts—and between the ways of God, and our ways—(chap. lv. 8, 9.)—that no powers which we possess can reach to the attainment of pardon and justification in his sight. No offering

that we can make—no sacrifice that we can present, can stand its ground a moment, when weighed against the balance of that perfection which shall fit us for a glorious immortality.

Happily we *have* the Scriptures for our guide and comfort. They have laid open to us, according to the prophet's expression, the thoughts and the ways of God; and their truth will abide the utmost investigation. No argument can withstand them—no subtilty can evade them—no infidelity can shake the rock of truth upon which their foundation is fixed. The wisdom and mercy they contain, exceed all that the heart of man can conceive; and certainly more than he can deserve. Penetrating—but not wounding—reproving, but

with the greatest kindness — convincing, but not disheartening — and threatening, it must not be forgotten — but with the most decided and alarming authority. Well indeed, and truly, is "the word of God" described by St. Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews — as being "quick, and powerful, and sharper "than any two-edged sword; piercing "even to the dividing of soul and spirit, "and of the joints and marrow; and "as a discerner of the thoughts and "intents of the heart." (chap. iv. 12.)

Such are the "Holy Scriptures, which "are able to make us wise unto sal- "vation through faith which is in Christ "Jesus." (2 Tim. iii. 15.)—"Search the "Scriptures," said Christ, to the unbelieving and gain-saying Jews—"for in them

" ye think ye have eternal life: and they " are they which testify of me." (John, v. 39.)

In addition to what we may learn, by our own immediate application, concerning Jesus as the appointed and predicted Saviour of mankind—whom "God," as we read in the 10th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, " anointed with " the holy ghost and with power: who " went about doing good, and healing " all that were oppressed of the devil "—or,—all who were under the domination of an evil disposition*—" for God was with him." (v. 38.)—in addition, I say, to what we may learn by our own immediate application concerning this mighty Re-

* Παντας τους καταδυναστευομενους υπο του διαβολου.

deemer, much evidence and conviction is also to be derived from our own private reflections. Many are the conditions and circumstances of life, in which a contemplative mind will be able to discover neither satisfaction, nor comfort, nor hope, but through the means and merits of some mediatorial power. Many are the moments, in which the most bewildering doubts, if not the most agonizing despair, must be the portion of him, who thinks to seek salvation through any concerted channels of his own; or who ventures to trust to his own righteousness for an acquittal at the throne of heaven.

I cannot go far into a subject of this kind, having already detained you so long. I will only add, that if we can be indu-

ced to acknowledge; and to submit to the influence of a power, which shall direct our minds to the love of God and of virtue, and which shall enable us to bear the temptations, the trials, and the vicissitudes of human life, with resolution, patience, and contentment; if we find ourselves able to conquer the fear of death, and to look at it as the unavoidable, but sure and straight path which leadeth to everlasting life and happiness — let us humbly and devoutly thank God for so inestimable a blessing; for from Him only, we may be assured, such a blessing can be derived. And He has offered it, and promised it to us, in the person of Jesus Christ. "He that believeth on the Son "of God," says St. John, "hath the wit- "ness in himself." (1 John v. 10.) A sure and certain testimony that the grace and

favour for God is with him. A testimony that will give the truest zest to the enjoyment of prosperity, and that will soften the visitations of adversity, be they never so afflicting.

When the hour then shall arrive, and how soon it may arrive, not one of us can tell, that we shall be called upon to bid adieu to the transitory scenes before us, and to yield up our souls into the hands of our Almighty Creator and Redeemer — God grant, that each of us may then feel the consolation expressed in the text, and be enabled to declare with St. Paul, who has given us the sentiments of conviction and experience: "I know in whom I "have believed, and am persuaded that "He is able to keep that which I have "committed unto Him against that day."

And "peace be to the brethren, and "love with faith, from God the Father, "and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph. vi. 23.)

SERMON VII

THE GOOD TIDINGS OF THE GOSPEL.

CHRISTMAS-DAY.

LUKE, ii. 10, 11.

" And the angel said unto them, fear
" not: for behold, I bring you good
" tidings of great joy, which shall
" be to all people.

" For unto you is born this day, in the
" city of David, a Saviour, which is
" Christ the Lord."

THUS did God, by the voice of angels, or spiritual messengers, announce the

commencement of that religion which we profess. At the same moment that Jesus, the Divine Author, exemplifier, and finisher of the Christian faith, was born in Bethlehem in Judea, according to the notice delivered ages before by the inspired prophets of Israel. I shall therefore employ the present opportunity, by laying before you a few of the leading circumstances connected with this wonderful manifestation of God's power.

Having frequently reminded you in how great a degree the truth of the Gospel or of Christ's religion, is built upon prophecy, I shall now pursue the same course, by turning your attention to some of the predictions that immediately allude to the birth of our holy Redeemer. And to these I shall add a few remarks upon

the peculiar excellency and advantages of the Christian religion.

The prophecies alluding to the birth or appearance of Jesus Christ, and which have presented themselves to me from the passage of Scripture chosen for my subject, are those respecting the time of his appearance—the place in which he was born—and the family from which he was to proceed.

I might begin by adverting to those declarations of a great and præternatural deliverer—or I shall say, of a Saviour, who was promised to the Jews, and to the Gentile nations; which are to be found in innumerable parts of the Old Testament.

I might turn your attention to those

parts of the ceremonial law delivered by Moses, in which sacrifices and oblations for sin, were expressly ordained by God; and were as decidedly intended to bear a reference to the final sacrifice made by Jesus Christ. Whoever has read, or will read that sacred volume which was written to make us wise unto salvation,—will not fail to discover the various means by which the coming and character of Christ were thus foretold and prefigured. And I had rather excite your own industry—I would rather wish to stir up a becoming spirit of enquiry among you—especially upon a subject about which, of all others, it were the height of folly to be idle or indifferent. Persuaded as I am, that conviction would attend your steps, and that your own present and eternal peace and happiness would be the result. I therefore forbear

from any quotations of this kind, and hasten to my particular purpose, which was, in the first place, to point out in what manner the time of Christ's appearance was prophetically described.

It has been beautifully and ingeniously remarked,* with a degree of reason and experience not liable to the imputation of superstition, "that the nearer men ap-"proach to their dissolution, their souls "grow more divine, and discern more of "futurity.

I know not how far a remark of this kind can be allowed to be applicable to our present subject; since the predictions of the inspired prophets were the palpa-

* Newton's Dissertations upon the Prophecies.

ble determinations of God's will, according as He directed the utterance of them. Nevertheless there is something peculiarly and unavoidably interesting, in the scene of Jacob's calling his children round his dying bed, whilst with the dignified solemnity of a patriarch at the moment of his dissolution, joined to the spirit of prophecy; he laid their future destinies before them. "Gather yourselves together," said he, "that I may tell you that which "shall befal you in the last days. Ga- "ther yourselves together, and hear, ye "sons of Jacob, and hearken unto Israel "your father." You will find the relation in the 49th chapter of Genesis.

I pass over the mention that is made of the twelve tribes or families of Israel,

excepting that of Judah, to which the present subject entirely belongs.

A common acquaintance with the Bible will show the great pre-eminence and authority that is every where ascribed to the tribe of Judah; to which the other tribes became gradually united, and in which the government of the Israelites was chiefly centered. "Insomuch," as a writer of great celebrity has remarked, "that Judah became the general name of "the whole nation; and after the Babylo- "nish captivity, they were no longer "called the people of Israel, but the peo- "ple of Judah, or Jews."* From this tribe David had his origin; and consequently we may look to the same for the descent of Jesus Christ. "For it is evident," as

* Newton.

St. Paul writes to the Hebrews, "that our "Lord sprang out of Judah." (vii 14.) These are only corroborations of the history which I am now attempting to lay before you.

When Jacob therefore foretold his children what should befal them, in the awful and impressive manner as it has been related, his language to Judah was as follows:

"Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren "shall praise. Thy hand shall be in the "neck of thine enemies, thy father's chil- "dren shall bow down before thee.

"Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, "my son, thou art gone up: he stooped "down—he couched as a lion, and as an "old lion—who shall rouse him up?

"The scepter shall not depart from "Judah, nor a law-giver from between his "feet, until Shiloh come. And unto him "shall the gathering of the people be."—It is only to the last portion of this emphatical and remarkable prediction, that I wish to solicit your attention.

A scepter is clearly understood to be an emblem of government.—And to whatever hands, or to whatever family the scepter is consigned—to them the supreme power of governing is committed. He who holds the scepter, is the acknowledged ruler of the people. It will also apply to the state or people themselves, since a nation without a ruler can scarcely deserve the name of a state—and will still less deserve that of a government.

Of the word Shiloh, I trust it will be sufficient, upon such contracted occasions as the present, to observe, that according to the several interpretations of that word, it includes every meaning applicable to the Messiah or Christ. Such as, one who was sent—which you know is frequently made a designation of Christ. "Him "whom the father hath sent," (John, x. 36, &c. &c. &c.) And so in innumerable parts of St. John's gospel. It means too, a peace-maker, a ruler, a Saviour, &c.* And to Christ, or to the Messiah, the earliest of the Jewish, as well as Christian writers of the greatest authority have constantly applied it.†

When therefore the patriarch propheti-

* Mede, &c. † Mede.

cally informed his descendants that the scepter should not depart from Judah until Shiloh came, He designed to inform them that the Jewish government should continue till the coming of the Messiah. And with it he coupled another event of great moment as a corroborative testimony, by adding, "and unto "him shall the gathering of the people be." Which has always been received as an allusion to that time when the Gentiles or heathens should be converted to Christ's religion. The Gentile, or heathen part of the world, being repeatedly spoken of in Scripture by the epithet of the nations or people.*

Accordingly, a very few years after

* Mede, &c. &c. &c.

Christ's first appearance, or birth—and still fewer after the time in which he lived on earth, and when by his preaching, and by the preaching of his apostles, many gentile nations were converted to Christianity —many people were gathered into the pale of the Christian Church; then did the scepter depart from Judah—then was the Jewish government finally and utterly overthrown by the Romans; and from that time to the present has that nation remained without any ruler, and without any government, or system of polity whatever. There are various prophecies to the same effect. And from them we learn, that according to the precise time specified by the sacred writers, did Christ come. Whilst the prophecy particularly in question, conveys to us a further proof of what is still unacknowledged by the greater

number of the Jews; which is, that the Messiah is already come: "and that Jesus "Christ is the person." "For," as the learned bishop Newton observes, "the "scepter was not to depart from Judah, "until the Messiah should come: but the "scepter hath long been departed, and "consequently the Messiah hath been "long come. The scepter departed at "the final destruction of Jerusalem, and "hath been departed now, as we may "say, seventeen centuries. And conse-"quently the Messiah came a little before "that period. And if the Messiah came "a little before that period; prejudice "itself cannot long make any doubt con-"cerning the person. All considerate "men must say, as Simon Peter said to "Jesus—Lord, to whom shall we go? "Thou hast the words of eternal life—

" and we believe, and are sure, that thou " art the Christ, the Son of the living " God."

I proceed with the second proposition to be considered, which was the specification of the place in which Christ should be born. In the 2d chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, we read, that when Herod, whom the Roman Emperor Augustus had constituted King of Judea, was informed of the birth of Jesus, " he was troubled, " and all Jerusalem with him." For knowing, most probably, what the Jewish prophets had said concerning the extraordinary appearance of a king, a ruler, a deliverer, who should have the supreme government, not only of Israel, but of all the world, he began to dread a competitor; and feared that his reign and power might

be shortly interrupted. He came therefore at once to the point. "And when "he had gathered all the chief priests "and scribes of the people together, he "demanded of them where Christ should "be born. And they said unto him, in "Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is "written by the prophet. And thou "Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not "the least among the princes of Juda: "for out of thee shall come a governor "that shall rule my people Israel." The prophecy is in the 5th chapter of Micah, whose words are these, varying but little from the quotation by St. Matthew: with an addition indeed of great importance to our subject. "But thou Bethlehem "Ephratah," to distinguish it from another "Bethlehem in the land of Zebulon, "though thou be little among the thou-

" sands of Judah; yet out of thee shall " he come forth unto me that is to be " ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have " been from of old, from everlasting." It must be sufficiently known to the greater part of those whom I am now addressing, that Christ is repeatedly spoken of as a king, a ruler, a governor, and a prince—not indeed according to the usual acceptation of those titles among us; but as one anointed of God—as one to whom all mankind should owe obedience; to whom " all power was given in heaven and in " earth." (Matt. xxviii. 18.) In conformity with the elevated language of Isaiah which you have just heard. " For unto " us a child is born; unto us a son is " given; and the government shall be " upon his shoulders: and his name shall " be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the

" Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the
" Prince of Peace. Of the increase of
" his government and peace there shall be
" no end, upon the throne of David, and
" upon his kingdom, to order it, and to
" establish it with judgment and with
" justice, from henceforth even for ever.
" The zeal of the Lord of hosts will per-
" form this."

And to whom can such lofty expressions be made applicable; with the last sentence of Micah's prophecy of the same import—when speaking of Him who was to come out of Bethlehem, and to be ruler in Israel, he subjoins — " whose " goings forth have been from of old, " from everlasting."

To whom, I repeat, can such expres-

sions allude—and they must be supposed to allude to some one — if not to that Almighty Being whose power was so abundantly and so undeniably manifested in the person of Jesus Christ?

St. Luke has shown us, as will be seen in the 2d chapter of his gospel, in what manner—or rather by what means it happened, by the Providence of God, that Jesus — the Messiah—the Shiloh — the Great and Mighty Redeemer — the Prince of Peace and Reconciliation between God and man, was born at Bethlehem. Namely, in consequence of an edict issued by the Emperor Augustus, that every person within his dominion should repair to his own city — that is, the city of his birth or family, for the purpose of being registered. "And Joseph," says the apostle, "also

" went up from Galilee, out of the city of " Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of " David, which is called Bethlehem, " (because he was of the house and lineage " of David,) to be taxed with Mary his " espoused wife, being great with child. " And so it was, that, while they were " there, the days were accomplished that " she should be delivered." And thus were the Scriptures concerning the place of Christ's nativity, literally fulfilled. As some of the Jews even, who were disputing upon the reality of Christ's character, observed. " Hath not the Scrip- " tures said, that Christ cometh of the " seed of David, and out of the town of " Bethlehem, where David was." (John vii. 42.) And this brings me to the third and last subject which I intended to

notice; and that is, the family from which the Saviour, the Messiah, was to proceed.

It would surely be an unnecessary waste of time, if I were to mention the several passages of Scripture where Christ is spoken of as the Son, or the descendant of David. And David, you know, to use the language of Scripture, "was the "Son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem-"Judah, whose name was Jesse." (1 Sam. xvii. 12.) I think, and hope, it may be deemed sufficient, if I advert to a very remarkable prophecy which will be found in the 11th chapter of Isaiah, where the prophet is comforting the Jews in the midst of their afflictions; not only with the prospect of their deliverance from a state of captivity, but also by raising their views to that scene of universal peace and hap-

piness, which should gradually ensue from the promulgation of Christ's religion; and with the promise of their final restoration, when all the nations of the world shall be converted to the pure and unsophisticated doctrines of the gospel.

" And there shall come forth a rod out
" of the stem of Jesse, and a branch
" shall grow out of his roots. And the
" spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him—
" the spirit of wisdom and understanding
" —the spirit of counsel and might—
" the spirit of knowledge, and of the fear
" of the Lord; and shall make him of
" quick understanding in the fear of the
" Lord; and he shall not judge after the
" sight of his eyes, neither reprove after
" the hearing of his ears. But with
" righteousness shall he judge the poor,

" and reprove with equity, for the meek " of the earth. And he shall smite the " earth with the rod of his mouth, and " with the breath of his lips shall he slay " the wicked. And righteousness shall " be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness " the girdle of his reins." And then comes a description of the peaceful dominion of Christ, when the wild and ungovernable passions of men shall become obedient to the voice of reason and religion; which is given under the figurative expressions of the taming of wild beasts. Or including, in the same declaration, the time when every living creature shall revert to its pristine state of innocence and inoffensiveness. " The wolf also shall " dwell with the lamb, and the leopard " shall lie down with the kid; and the " calf and the young lion, and the fatling

" together; and a little child shall lead " them." It must be owned to be a very beautiful picture, where the whole face of nature shall be changed, into almost the opposite of what we now have before us.

" And in that day there shall be a root " of Jesse, which shall stand for an " ensign of the people;" a banner or standard for all people to flock to. " To " it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest " shall be glorious. And it shall come " to pass in that day, that the Lord shall " set his hand again the second time, to " recover the remnant of his people, " which shall be left, from Assyria, and " from Egypt, and from Pathros, and " from Cush, and from Elath, and from " Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the " islands of the sea. And he shall set

" up an ensign for the nations, and shall " assemble the outcasts of Israel, and " gather together the dispersed of Judah, " from the four corners of the earth." Such are the blessings that are to spring, in God's due time, from the stem, or from an offspring of Jesse. And to whom shall we ascribe this work of power, wisdom, and mercy, except to that wonderful child of Bethlehem, whose miraculous birth we this day celebrate? Even that Saviour, whom the angel announced to the shepherds, as Christ the Lord. For He was born precisely at the time foretold by the prophets—He was brought forth in the city pointed out for ages as the seat of redemption — He descended from the family, declared from the earliest ages of the world to be the channel, through which all the nations of the earth were to

be blessed. Even from the tribe of Judah, and from the stock of Jacob, to whom, as to Abraham and Isaac his progenitors, the promises of a great and universal Redeemer were originally made. "Now to Abraham, and his seed," as St. Paul writes to the Galatians, "were the "promises made. He saith not unto "seeds, as of many; but as of one. And "to *thy* seed, which is Christ." (chap. iii. 16.)

These are circumstances that deserve our most serious attention. Supported as they are by an extraordinary chain of evidence, and by as striking a connection between sacred and profane history. Let us then learn to think seriously of them. Not hearing them, nor meditating upon them as idle tales—put together by the

efforts of human ingenuity, or by the craft of human artifice. But considering them as the gracious effects of God's will and power, for the security of man's present and future happiness. And thus shall we be enabled to comprehend and to acknowledge the excellency and advantages of our holy religion—with a few remarks upon which, I shall draw to a conclusion.

It is certain that the excellency of Christ's religion is principally derived from the abundant and irrefutable testimonies of its truth and divine origin with which God has been pleased to surround it. But its sublimity and excellency are by no means confined to this. They are to be equally acknowledged in the wisdom, the reasonableness, the mercy, and

the justice, so conspicuous in every part of it, and the ease with which it may be adapted to the understanding of every description of men, and to every rank and condition in life, sufficient for all the purposes for which it was intended and designed by its omnipotent Author.

And such is the variety and simplicity of the instruction which it affords, that whoever wishes to consult his happiness either with regard to this life, or that which is to come; will find no means so sure of accomplishing his end, as by applying to the Gospel. For there is scarcely a situation in life, or any event or accident to which mankind is liable, for which the Gospel will not open itself

as a source of the truest consolation. It enhances all the blessings, and moderates, if it does not utterly vanquish, all the evils and afflictions that fall to the lot of human nature. These are circumstances, taken together or separately, which entitle the publication of Christ's religion to the appellation of "tidings of great joy to all "people"—for such is the import of the word Gospel in its original language.

But we must not overlook the most obvious, supereminent, and peculiar character belonging to the Gospel; which is that of distinguishing the utter impossibility of our fulfilling the law of righteousness, and thereby averting the just judgments of God; from the gratuitous promise of reconciliation between God and

man through the medium of an appointed Saviour and Redeemer.*

When a certain man stood up on purpose, as we are told in the 10th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, to *tempt* Jesus, by asking him what he should do to inherit eternal life; our Lord, aware of his intention, made him no direct answer, but asked him "what is written in the law? "How readest thou? and he answering "said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God "with all thy heart, and with all thy "soul, and with all thy strength, and "with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as

* Non dubium est Apostolos singulari consilio, appellationem tam dulcem et blandam suæ Doctrinæ tribuisse, ut insignius esset discrimen Legis et promissionis de reconciliatione. MELANCTHON DE EVANGELIO.

" thyself." Well, said Christ—" Thou " hast answered right. This do, and " thou shalt live." Such is the condition of the law.

The law is positive, and absolute, and to be effectual requires perfect obedience. But what person is there so presumptuous as to say or to think that he can fulfil it? the law requires pure offerings—it calls for spotless victims, and for holy sacrifices. And supposing the only sacrifice which we can make to be that of the heart or mind—which in fact is the case, what human being is there that can pretend to offer unto God a pure heart? a heart pure in thought?—" Who can say, I have made " my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" (Prov xx. 9.) Who can say, " I am clean " without transgression, I am innocent,

" neither is there iniquity in me." (Job. xxxiii. 9.) The law pronounces no man just, or acceptable to God, unless the conditions of obedience be complete. " There-" fore," as St. Paul argues, " by the deeds " of the law there shall no flesh be justified " in the sight of God." (Rom. iii. 20.)*

The promise of salvation then through Christ, was freely given to supply the unavoidable defects of human ability in this respect; as St. Paul again argues in his same epistle to the Romans. " For " what the law could not do, in that it " was weak through the flesh, God (did," " by) sending his own son in the likeness " of sinful flesh; and for sin, condemned " sin in the flesh: that the righteousness

* Nemo enim legi satisfacit. M.

" of the law might be fulfilled in us, who " walk not after the flesh, but after the " spirit." And therefore he observes, " there is now no condemnation to them " that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not " after the flesh, but after the spirit. (Rom. viii. 1, 3, 4.). That is, they who no longer confide in their fulfilment of the law, which must be imperfect, but in that promise of forgiveness and acceptance which God has made them through the perfect righteousness of Christ.

This then is the cause which at this holy season calls forth the spirit of devotional joy and thanksgiving; that " unto " us was born this day, in the city of " David, a Saviour, which is Christ the " Lord."

Let us give the subject the consideration it deserves—not forgetting the many circumstantial proofs, which God has been graciously pleased to give, in compassion to our infirmities, of the truth and excellence of our holy religion. "And "God grant, that we may grow in grace, "and in the knowledge of our Lord and "Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be "glory both now and for ever. (2 Peter, iii. 18.)

SERMON VIII.

PHARISAICAL TRADITION AND HYPOCRISY.

MATTHEW, XV. 10, 11.

"*And he called the multitude, and*
"*said unto them, hear, and un-*
"*derstand. Not that which goeth*
"*into the mouth defileth a man;*
"*but that which cometh out of*
"*the mouth; that defileth a man.*"

IN offering a few comments upon the portion of St. Matthew's Gospel which

you have just heard, I shall show in what manner the words I have chosen for my subject were introduced; and hope in this, as in many other instances, to make it appear, that the most essential quality of religion is sincerity.

The Scribes and Pharisees, who are frequently represented as the objects of Christ's reprobation, on account of their superstition and hypocrisy, are said to have put a question to Jesus, respecting certain traditions, that is, certain sayings, or opinions, or determinations, framed by themselves or by some of their predecessors, to which they paid a greater deference than to the law of Moses; and lessened the import and value of the direct commandments of God. "Why," said they, with great boldness and

subtilty, "Do thy Disciples transgress "the tradition of the elders?—for they "wash not their hands when they eat "bread."

Our Lord makes them no direct answer, but points out a necessary and becoming distinction between the observance of an equivocal ceremony, and the obedience due to an immediate commandment of God; which these Scribes and Pharisees had perverted, and indeed almost annihilated, by a pretended appeal to the sanctimonious dictates of conscience. "But he answered and said "unto them, why do ye also transgress the "commandment of God by your tradi-"tion? For God commanded, saying, "Honour thy father and mother: and he "that curseth father or mother, let him

" die the death. But ye say, whosoever
" shall say to his father or his mother,
" it is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest
" be profited by me: and honour not his
" father or his mother—he shall be free.
" Thus have ye made the commandment
" of God of none effect by your tradi-
" tion."

Now it may be necessary to show you how this commandment was thus hypocritically infringed and abrogated.

You are all, no doubt, well acquainted with the fifth commandment, respecting the honour due to your parents, and perhaps with other divine obligations to the same purpose, which are to be found in the law of Moses, and indeed throughout the Scriptures. But probably you are

not aware to what extent such holy precepts may be carried, and were intended to be carried, in the eye of reason, of justice, and sincerity.

To honour your parents, certainly means, in the first instance, to show them every possible mark of obedience, respect, and attention. And if these few words were thoroughly and generally understood, there would be little need of saying any more upon the subject. But there are many occasions upon which the affection, and regard, and duty of a child towards its parent are to be demonstrated, which do not come within the common acceptation of the word honour, or which may even be separated by subtilty, from the common received notions of obedience, or respect, or atten-

tion. It is not the letter, but the spirit of a law, that principally deserves our notice.

The recollection of what a parent of almost the slightest feeling must necessarily have endured on account of his offspring, through the years of helpless infancy—the watchings, the protection, the provision, the gradual instruction, the sacrifices and privations, the care, and pains, and anxiety attached to the future welfare and advancement of a child—these are emotions which more or less occupy the breast and employ the moments of most parents, and which call for some sort of a reciprocal return as nature and necessity may require it. Honour is a cold word to express the returns due to parental fondness—that is, as it is gene-

rally used, though it is a very significant word rightly understood.

The Greeks and Romans had admirable laws to this purpose. The Hebrews themselves were not without precepts of the same nature, independent of the law of Moses. They held, that a son was bound to provide food for his father—to clothe him—to lead him in and out—to wash his face, his hands, and his feet, if need should require it—nay, if he had no other method of supporting him, he was not only permitted, but bound to beg for him.*

Now how are these duties, taught us, as they are, by natural affection, and

* Pole, Whitby, &c. &c.

emanating, as they must, from the heart—how are they to be compared with the superficial tradition of its being sinful to eat with unwashen hands?

There is one exemplification indeed of the word Honour, to be met with in the Scriptures, applied to the Deity, and which is extremely analogous to our present subject. "Honour the Lord," says Solomon, "with thy substance." (Prov. iii. 9.) That is, so use your substance, or your possessions, that God and religion may be honoured in the application. And hence is it to be inferred, that we honour our earthly parents, not only by the prudence and integrity of our own lives; but by ministering to their necessities whenever it is in our power to do so. To this may be added frequent marks of

tenderness, submission, and forbearance, by which we shall exhibit the finest and most touching sense of honour, of respect, and gratitude.

Let us now see in what manner these crafty interrogators had evaded, and, as Christ observes, had "rendered of none "effect the commandments of God," respecting the honour due to parents, "by "their tradition."

The Hebrews had a custom of dedicating a part, or the whole of their possessions to the service of God, to the temple, or to religious purposes. And whatsoever was so devoted or set aside, was, in their language, called Corban—that is, a holy gift, and was on no account to be applied to other uses. So that their ne-

cessitous parents were to be abandoned to a state of penury, or to starve, sooner than these fanciful religionists would break in upon their consecrated heaps to relieve them.

It is difficult to say whether the folly, or the hypocrisy and iniquity of such ostentatious pretensions to piety is the greater But mark with what severity our blessed Saviour censures this fatal abuse of that understanding which God has given to man. I repeat his reply to them from the 7th chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, where it seems to be more fully related. "He answered, and said unto "them,—Well hath Esaias prophecied of "you hypocrites, as it is written, This "people honoureth me with their lips, "but their heart is far from me. How-

" beit, in vain do they worship me, teach-
" ing for doctrines, the commandments of
" men. For laying aside the command-
" ments of God, ye hold the tradition of
" men, as the washing of pots, and cups,
" and many other such like things ye do.
" And he said unto them, full well ye
" reject the commandment of God, that
" ye may keep your own tradition. For
" Moses said, Honour thy father and
" thy mother; and whosoever curseth, or
" rather revileth, or speaketh evil of his
" father or mother, let him die the death.
" But ye say, if a man shall say to his
" father or mother, it is corban, that is
" to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou
" mightest be profited by me, he shall be
" free. And ye suffer him no more to do
" ought for his father or his mother:
" making the word of God of no effect

" through your tradition, which ye have " delivered: and many such like things " do ye."

I think you cannot be more clearly convinced how strictly the Gospel of Christ, which contains the religion we profess, adheres to the dictates of reason, of truth, and justice. And how highly it recommends the purity and sincerity of the heart, in preference to the external use of any custom or ceremony, in which the heart is not warmly, and zealously, and reasonably affected; and where the approbation of conscience, and the love of God and of righteousness is not principally consulted. Conscience, my Christian brethren, is sometimes a severe, but always a true monitor. And conscience will tell us, as Christ has told us, that

"God is to be worshipped in spirit and "in truth." (John, iv. 24.)

Let me beseech you however to remember, that I have no intention to speak of customs or ceremonies of religious profession or tendency, as if all were to be discarded, or treated with indifference. Taking the world as it goes, and perceiving the imperfections and weaknesses of mankind, it is not to be denied that there are rites and ceremonies, which are justly to be considered as the vital principles of religion; no less than of all decency and decorum through the various paths of life. And the lesson that I would wish to inculcate, in conformity with my present subject, is simply this — that the use of no rite or ceremony, under the cover of religious obedience, not even of the most

highly sanctioned, can be expected to be available in the production of any good, unless the spiritual worship of God, and the desire of purifying the heart and life be the principle motive. Prayer itself, to go no farther, can be of no use, unless, as our Lord observed, "The mouth "speaketh out of the abundance of the "heart." (Matt. xii. 34.) How much rather therefore should we be careful of ascribing any sanctity, or of placing any confidence in such unmeaning and unprofitable customs or ceremonies, as have no higher origin than the fallible conceptions or decrees of men. And which so far from promising any advantage to ourselves or others, may lead us to trespass upon the unequivocal commands and determinations of Almighty God.

Such were many of the notions and customs received among the Scribes and Pharisees, which we find so frequently and so strongly reprobated by Jesus Christ, the divine and holy Author of our religion—who, in the instance before us, turned with indignation from these blind, mistaken, and deluding teachers, and addressed the surrounding multitude in the following impressive manner. "Hear," said He, be attentive, "and "understand. Not that which goeth "into the mouth defileth a man; but that "which cometh out of the mouth, this "defileth a man."

You will perceive that an allusion is made in these words, to the accusation brought by the Scribes and Pharisees

against the disciples of Jesus, of eating bread with unwashen hands.

The frequent ablutions or washings of the person, particularly of the hands, in the eastern part of the world, and in all hot climates, may be easily accounted for on the score of necessity—of cleanliness, decency, and refreshment. St. Mark informs us, with an accuracy often to be noted in the sacred writings, that "The Pharisees, and all the Jews, ex-"cept they wash their hands oft, eat not; "holding the tradition of the elders. "And when they come from the market, "except they wash, they eat not." (ch. vii. 3, 4.) Nor is it extraordinary, that a custom of this nature should be especially considered as a duty in the exercises of religion, or that it should become inter-

woven with religious principles. For although an evil-disposed heart or mind will, and does lead to the pollution of the body; it is also true, that habits of filth and indolence, and a disregard to cleanliness and decency, will debase and corrupt the mind. Hence the washing or purifying of the body, became an emblem to denote the purity of the mind. And hence in the law prescribed by Moses, we find innumerable instances where washing was made a most indispensable, and a most significant part in the ordinances of religion. Thus when Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the priests office, the commandment was, " and " Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring " unto the door of the tabernacle of the " congregation, and shalt wash them " with water.", (Ex. xxix. 4.) In the

magnificent temple also, built by Solomon, there were lavers, we are told, in which the offerings were to be washed; and a sea, or an immense bath, "for the "priests to wash in." (2 Chron. iv. 6.) And thus when Pilate was determined to signify his wish to release Jesus, and that he would take no part in his condemnation or punishment, "He took water, and "washed his hands before the multitude, "saying, I am innocent of the blood of "this just person, see ye to it." (Matt. xxvii. 24.) So far was external washing used, as I have said, not merely for decency's sake, but often figuratively to express the sincerity of the intention, and the inward sanctity and purity of the heart. Where these essential qualities were wanting, we are explicitly shown, by the word of God, that washing was

of no use, at least not in a religious point of view. For in the language of the prophet Jeremiah, whilst expostulating with the Jews, upon their obdurate disobedience to God's laws — he observes, "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and "take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity "is marked before me, saith the Lord "God." (chap. ii. 22.) And here too it is apparent that the spirit of God's laws is to be noted, and not the mere verbal expression.

I may still be permitted to mention an opinion that prevailed amongst those who were superstitiously or enthusiastically disposed to refine upon the just and reasonable decrees or institutions of the Almighty, that whatever food was dressed in vessels that were not cleansed, or

that was eaten with unwashed hands, contracted the foulness or impurities of either; which were again communicated to the bodies, and even to the mind or soul of the consumer.* But although we know that for wise and good reasons doubtless, the use of some beasts for sustenance was prohibited, and particularly for sacrifice, either as being prejudicial to the health, or as not being congenial with the nature of a holy offering. Yet all such fantastical notions, springing from the unbounded fervour of human conceptions or inventions, are fully obviated by St. Paul's declaration, that "every "creature of God is good, and nothing "to be refused, if it be received with

* See Grotius upon this passage of St. Matthew, "*Nimirum*," says he, "*inanis metus inane remedium.*"

" thanksgiving." (1 Tim. iv. 4.) And they are still more completely refuted by our blessed Saviour in the words of the text — " Not that which goeth into " the mouth defileth a man; but that " which cometh out of the mouth; this " defileth a man." — Which parabolical expressions Christ afterwards explained to his own disciples, who seemed not to comprehend them. " Do ye not yet under- " stand," said Jesus, " that whatsoever " entereth in at the mouth, goeth into the " belly, and is cast out into the draught? " But those things which proceed out of " the mouth come forth from the heart; " and they defile the man," — or render him sordid, debased, and unholy. " For " out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, " murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, " false-witness, blasphemies. These are

" the things which defile a man: but to " eat with unwashen hands defileth not " a man."

This reasoning is so plain, that it scarcely needs any elucidation; but it may nevertheless be remarked, that our Lord's intention was to show the fallacy, and the evil tendency of those doctrines which had been introduced by the vain conceits of enthusiasts, and by the boldness of ignorance and hypocrisy; not only to the perversion and extinction of God's holy Commandments, but to the absolute indulgence of the most heinous and criminal offences. And they who could pursuade themselves, and endeavour to persuade others, to refuse sustenance and support to an indigent parent, — or indeed I may say, to any fellow creature in want, under the pretence that their means of

relieving him were devoted to the service of God, or of religion; deserved to be ranked among the basest of hypocrites, and the vilest of sinners.

Christ does not here enter into the question of washing the hands, as a moral or a religious observance. But he has plainly and clearly admonished us to remember, that all manner of sin and evil has its origin and continuance in the heart. And that God is to be served and worshipped according to the intention and disposition of the heart or mind — by the punctual discharge of such duties as reason and conscience will call upon us to practice: and not by the performance of such actions as cannot have, abstractedly in themselves, the power of producing either good or evil.

The spirit of religion requires us to devote *ourselves* to God. And the gift and sacrifice that is expected of a Christian on *his* part, is that of his soul and mind; his affections and desires. The oblation that God has appointed and accepted for the imperfections of human nature, is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To these we are to look for pardon and reconciliation, and for the enjoyment of eternal glory. And not to any such "gifts and sacrifices," as St. Paul observes in the 9th chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, "that could not make him, "that did the service, perfect, as pertain- "ing to the conscience. And which stood "only in meats, and drinks, and divers "washings, and carnal ordinances, im- "posed on them — that is, the Jews — "until the time of reformation." (v.

9. 10.) Which signifies, as he explains it, until "Christ, an High Priest of good "things to come, by a greater and more "perfect tabernacle, not made with "hands; that is to say, not of this "building,"—speaking of the Jewish Tabernacle. — "Neither by the blood of "goats and calves, but by his own blood "He entered in once into the holy place, "having obtained eternal redemption for "us." (ib.)

I humbly hope, my Christian brethren, that I may have succeeded in some degree, in my endeavours to persuade you, that the badge and criterion — the proof of our religion, is sincerity. And God grant that we may increase in the knowledge and love of God, and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That we may

be enabled, by his grace, to admire, to venerate, and to obey a religion so conformable to reason, in every point of view, so transcendently established by every mark of truth.

The commandments of God are pure and explicit — unencumbered by superstition, *as they are free from enthusiasm;* undeniably calculated to make us happy members of society in this world, and thence to fit us for an inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. And though they call for a warmth of affection, and for a zealous and steady compliance, they are rather degraded, than honoured or recommended, by that furious zeal, which, boasting of its own inventions, has, in all ages of the world, shown an attachment to trifles, whilst it has omitted the

weightier matters of the law. And now unto Him who alone is able "to build us "up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, accepta- "ble to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. ii. 5.) "To Him be glory and dominion "for ever and ever." (1 Pet. v. 11.)

SERMON IX.

THE COMFORT ARISING FROM BELIEF IN CHRIST.

JOHN, xiv. 1, 2, 3.

" *Let not your heart be troubled; ye*
" *believe in God: believe also in*
" *me.*

" *In my Father's house are many man-*
" *sions: if it were not so, I would*
" *have told you. I go to prepare a*
" *place for you.*

" *And if I go and prepare a place for*

" *you, I will come again, and re-*
" *ceive you unto myself: that where*
" *I am, there ye may be also.*"

It is natural to suppose that the disciples of Jesus Christ would be dispirited and alarmed at the prospect of his leaving them. Whilst He was present, the continual manifestation of his power kept their confidence alive; and his example was an immediate spur to their emulation. They found Him, in every way, an infallible protection to them. But as the time approached, when, as He had told them, " He was to be delivered into the hands " of sinful men, and to be crucified," (Luke, xxiv. 7.) the difficulties and dangers of their undertaking would naturally be impressed upon them. For Christ had not buoyed them up with any hopes of

temporal prosperity or advantage; but on the contrary had truly and clearly apprized them of the opposition, the hardships, and the sufferings they would have to encounter and to endure.

It is true He promised them an eternal crown of glory as the reward of their perseverance. And whilst they beheld his triumphs, exhibited in the miracles which He wrought — they felt themselves tolerably secure in his promises. And yet even at this time, there are several instances in which we may perceive that the weakness of human nature yielded to their fears, and shook their conviction. Still his presence, no doubt, was a never-failing comfort and support. And if Peter cried out, when he thought himself sinking in the waves, his instantaneous safety

re-established his hopes, and re-animated his endeavours.

But when Christ was to be removed from them, and they were to be left to themselves — it is no wonder if they felt some apprehension of their inability to struggle with the world, and of their insufficiency to maintain that doctrine which He had taught them, and which He commanded them to disseminate.

St. John then, in that part of his Gospel which has been read to you, and in the two or three following chapters, has recorded a discourse of our Saviour's, in which He administers to his disciples, a stream of consolation suitable to their condition. A consolation to be derived from what they had seen and known, and from

that expectation which they were justified in indulging, in consequence of their own knowledge, and of the circumstances to which they had been witnesses.

But here I must stop to make one observation, which is, that reason will not warrant us to judge of Christ's Doctrine, in the same manner that we would judge of any human institution or production. We are to judge of our holy religion as the work of God. And as far as it will stand the test, our judgment will be unquestionably decided. We have no oracles but the Prophets, Christ, and the Apostles. Philosophy, or the love of wisdom, can teach us nothing, but to discern the wisdom of God. And the power of attaining to this, is, I humbly conceive, the truest philosophy, and the only wis-

dom. The religion of Christ, is established, with respect to argument, upon a small, that is a contracted, but firm foundation. It is established upon the fulfilment of prophecy. And unless we can set this aside, there can be no opening for investigation, and conjecture must be presumptuous. I believe it will be admitted, that the utmost extent of what is called philosophy, to which the mind of man has hitherto attained, has never been able to account for any one event predicted in the Scriptures, without considering it as the completion of prophetic inspiration.

Can we, for instance, behold the present disconsolate state of the Jewish nation, and pretend to account for it upon any principles of human reasoning?

Is it possible that prejudice, or incredulity, with regard to the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, can tempt us, on the one hand to believe, that any people would submit to live in the diminished estimation of the world, if they could extricate themselves? And surely the Jews have, apparently, the same means in their hands of establishing a national government, as people of other nations and of other religious persuasions possess — if the interdict of God were not clearly upon them, and if the denunciations of Christ against them were not undeniably verified.

It is the same with the whole system, and with every part of the creation. And if we pretend to judge of any work of

God by any other rule than that of his almighty and incomprehensible will and power, we shall soon be convinced of the shortness of our understanding — great and adequate as it is for the purposes for which it has been granted us.

Upon these premises, which I trust will be found to be well grounded, and which I hope have been made intelligible, I proceed to a few observations upon part of that interesting discourse which our Lord held with his disciples, not long before his departure out of this world. And it is a discourse peculiarly interesting to us, as it contains that consolation which it is the exclusive property of Christ's religion to bestow — as well as a doctrine that will enable us to triumph over the trials and

inequalities of the present life, as certainly as its truth is irrefutable, and worthy of our utmost dependence.

But the consolation which Christianity is capable of affording, and the result of all the doctrines belonging to it, will in a great measure depend upon the disposition of our own hearts and minds, and upon the degree of credence which we give to its authority. For when we speak of Faith, we speak of a firm assent to the whole doctrine of the Gospel; without which, we should be again in the darkness of heathenism, and the confusion of different opinions would be endless. "Let "not your heart," then said Christ, "be "troubled; ye believe in God — believe "also in me."

It surely cannot be necessary, as St. Paul intimates, to be continually dwelling upon "the *principles* of the doctrine "of Christ,"—or to be for ever "laying "the foundation of repentance from dead "works, and of faith toward God," (Heb. vi. 1.) in a country where Christianity is so generally diffused, and where its tenets are so repeatedly and minutely made the subjects of religious exhortation. But it may be still necessary to remark, that God is to be considered, not only with regard to the existence of such a being, but also with regard to his will.

For the former of these propositions, we may trust to our senses. We have only to look round upon the vast theatre of the world, and acknowledge the Almighty Creator. So that wherever the

works of God are seen, there is He said to be. Hence we infer, and speak of the omnipresence of the Deity. And it was this self-evident principle that led the wisest among the Heathens to contemplate God and nature as the same thing. But our knowledge of the will of God is to be derived, not only from such assurances as our reason and judgment will suggest; but, also, and indeed principally, from that revelation by which He has laid himself open to us in the holy Scriptures. And this upon such testimonies as it is impossible to deny. And here too, wherever we behold such demonstrations as are beyond the common bounds of nature, we are led to acknowledge the extraordinary presence or appearance of the Deity. Such is the case with regard to prophecies, to miracles; with the recon-

ciliation and redemption of mankind through Jesus Christ.

We cannot therefore but perceive that a just distinction is to be made between those demonstrations of God's existence which are offered to us through the medium of our senses, or, I shall say, of our own immediate discernment and knowledge; and that revelation of his will which is given us in the Scriptures; and which, at the same time, according to his condescending goodness and mercy, has been accompanied with sufficient proof to produce conviction in the mind of every reasonable inquirer.*

* Ita primum de essentiâ Dei judicat, (says Melancthon speaking of the church,) non ex humanis imaginationibus, sed ex verbo Dei, certis testimoniis tradito.

In tracing the progress of God's will towards mankind; we shall not be able to deny that the wicked deserve to be punished. And if we should look to repentance as a plea for mitigation, or for remission of our numerous sins and frailties, we cannot fail to recollect, that repentance itself, with every work of man, must be imperfect; and that something must be wanting to render it fully acceptable in the sight of God. But of reconciliation, sanctification, and redemption, we can know nothing—nor can we conceive or devise any thing, except what has been revealed to us in the word of God. There we are told, and shown, in what manner God has perfected his will with regard to our salvation, through the means and mediation of Jesus Christ. And until, I repeat, we can refute the testimo-

nies which God has given us of Christ's mediatorial efficacy, it can never be deemed superstition to admit the doctrine, and to receive it as the rule of our lives. Superstition, on the contrary, remains with those who set up their own wisdom against the will and wisdom of God, as it is plainly revealed to us in the sacred writings of the Prophets and Apostles.

Christ gave sufficient proofs of the divine power which dwelt within Him. And we may presume it was upon such principles as I have now shortly laid before you, that He began his address to the disciples, by exhorting them to add belief in Him, to their belief in God. "Ye "believe in God—believe also in Me." And it was upon the same principles that St. Paul was justified in maintaining the

doctrine of man's reconciliation to God through Christ; and in pronouncing, with the heroic firmness of conviction as well as of inspiration, that "God was in "Christ, reconciling the world unto "Himself." (Heb. ii. 17. 2 Cor. v. 19.)

Conscious therefore of his power to confer immortality and happiness, our Lord proceeds to comfort the declining spirits of his disciples, with promises which could not fail to excite their perseverance in promulgating the gospel; especially when they soon after beheld those promises substantiated and ratified by his resurrection, and by the direct manifestation of God's holy spirit—as on the day of Pentecost. (Acts, ii. 1, &c.)

The evidences for the truth of the Gos-

pel have kept pace with the revolutions of time. We ourselves see the fulfilment of several of those prophecies upon which it was established, in the present condition of those people to whom they allude. We may perceive that Christianity has continued greatly to extend itself, and that at this day it is particularly taking hasty strides towards the completion of its Divine Author's assurance, that it "shall be preached throughout the whole "world,* for a witness to all nations," before the consummation of all things. (Matt. xxiv. 14.)

We may perceive the good effects of it wherever it has been preached; and we

* Εν ολη τη οικουμενη—in every habitable part of the globe.

may mark its efficacy in the lives of those who have embraced it warmly, and practised it unreservedly. Such, who, as Christ said, "have received it into an "honest and good heart"—that is, who have examined it impartially, and have been happily disposed to adopt its precepts. Nor is it by any means to be considered as a mere negative proof of its authenticity, that although some of its doctrines have been treated contemptuously, and with an unaccountable degree of incredulity, not one of them has been undermined or refuted. The scoffs of pretended philosophers, great, though perverted, as their talents may have been,—together with the sneers of the openly dissolute, have been dispersed,—to use an expression of the Psalmist's, "like the "chaff which the wind driveth away

" from the face of the earth." (Ps. i. 5.) Or like the vapours of a cloud, broken by the beams of the sun of righteousness.

Under the concurrent testimony of circumstances of this nature, the remaining part of our Lord's discourse which is contained in the text, is as applicable to us, as it was to those disciples to whom it was delivered—and to whom it was so offered as a foundation of comfort, against the numerous evils and vicissitudes of the present life. " In my Father's house are " many mansions. If it were not so, I " would have told you. I go to prepare " a place for you. And if I go and pre- " pare a place for you, I will come again, " and receive you unto myself: that where " I am, there ye may be also."

I cannot perceive any great need of comment upon these words—or that they require any particular explanation. For in whatever way we receive the expression of " many mansions"—many habitations — many resting, or abiding places, it will lead us to acknowledge and to adore the extension of God's mercy. And I accept the whole, and with great humility offer it to your consideration, as the gracious promise of God through Christ — who is emphatically called " The word," the word of God; God speaking and acting in him, and through him; according to the tenor of several expressions in Scripture, and according to what Christ himself says a little after in this same chapter. " The words that I speak unto you, I " speak not of myself; but the father that

" dwelleth in me; *He* doeth the works." (v. 10.) Hence subsisted the unity of God and Christ; and hence were the apostles and disciples reminded, or exhorted, that as they believed in God, as the author and preserver of all things — so were they also to believe in Christ, as the ostensible mediator between God and man — the author and finisher of the Christian faith — the Redeemer — the Dispenser of all blessings — the Preserver of all those who believe in his name and conform to his precepts. God having " given unto him all power in heaven and " in earth." (Matt. xxviii. 18.) " I go," therefore said he, " to prepare a place for " you; and if I go and prepare a place " for you, I will come again, and receive " you unto myself, that where I am, there " ye may be also."

It is to the inheritance of this promise of God through Christ, that, in the language of the Scriptures, and especially of the Gospel, we are called. But *how* are we called? We are called by the indisputable voice of prophets, of Christ the anointed of God, of the apostles — and by the influence of God's holy spirit upon our hearts and minds.

We may deny these solemn and important propositions; but we cannot disprove them. And therefore let us take care *how we deny them;* or how we disregard or neglect them. It behoves us on the contrary, to follow the advice of St. Peter, "and give all diligence to make our call-"ing and election sure," by an energetic, and, at the same time, submissive obedience to the will of God in all things.

"For so," adds the apostle, "an entrance "shall be ministered unto us abundantly "into the everlasting kingdom of our "Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2 Peter, i. 10, 11.)

Imperfect as we are, and must be at the best, the hope that shall cheer us in the decline of life, and that shall keep doubt and despair at a distance from the bed of death; will be the hope and expectation of God's acceptance of our imperfect obedience through the merits and meditation of the appointed Redeemer; and not for any merits of our own. For how shall we pretend to any merit, when God, who knows the inmost recesses of our hearts is our judge, and when eternal salvation is the prize we aim at?

" If man," as Job says, " will contend " with God, he cannot answer Him one of " a thousand. If I justify myself, mine " own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, " I am perfect, it shall also prove me per- " verse." (ch. ix. 3, 20.)* But it is not only in the decline of life, or in the last moments of our present existence, that we are to look for the comforts and supports of our religion. The promise of Christ before us, was intended as an antidote to the weakness and infirmities of human nature, and to the temptations and trials which are likely to interrupt us in the discharge of our Christian duty, through every part of life. And most particularly in that part, when the warmth of our affections, and our unavoidable

* The whole chapter is beautiful.

engagements with the world, make the dangers that surround us the greater. It was to supply the place and inefficacy of that dependence they had been wont to rest upon the religion of their forefathers; it was to calm the fears that already possessed them, on account of the opposition which they foresaw, and which they were taught to expect; it was as a stimulus to their resolution, and to their exertion in the cause committed to them, that Christ laid before his disciples the certain prospect of being united with Him in the participation of eternal joy and happiness, and in the glory of his everlasting kingdom: provided they did not suffer their confidence to be shaken, and maintained inviolate their reliance upon his word. And let us consult the powers of human nature — let us search the depths of phi-

losophic theories; let us see what speculators in religion have done. What stability have *they* given to virtue? What means of patience have *they* furnished against the variable distresses and disappointments to which we are all liable, and in which the whole race of mankind is more or less involved? In what way have *they* instructed us contentedly to bear the losses and privations which fall to the lot of most of us? What equivalent have *they* pretended or ventured to offer for the endurance of a life of complicated misery, with which some, and perhaps not a few, are visited? What recompence have *they* held up as a meed for the struggles of resolution and resignation? Or how, in the last place, have *they* endeavoured to carry us before the tribunal of God, covered, as we are, with frailties and im-

perfections, to say the least of our unavoidable condition? It will be no easy matter to find an answer to any of these suggestions, independent of those hopes, those well-grounded hopes, which are given us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have seen them completely realised in the lives of the apostles; who triumphed even in death, and have left the faith which they imbibed, and the doctrines they delivered, firm and unsullied as they received them. We behold the promises of the Gospel verified in the preservation of our religion. And, as I have already observed, in the lives of incalculable numbers in every country wherever it has hitherto made its way; who have consulted and insured their happiness by their obedience to the will of God as it is there revealed. For

there the sincere and pious believer looks forward to a wise, and merciful reward of his labours. There the suffering Christian looks forward to an adequate recompence of his faith and submission. And there is the repentant sinner recalled from a hopeless termination, by the provision which God has made for his pardon and reconcilement, in the spotless sacrifice of the Redeemer. "Who," then may we ask with the beloved disciple, "is he that "overcometh the world, but he that be- "lieveth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John, v. 5.) As therefore we believe in God, let us also believe in Christ; that when He shall appear in his glory as the judge of the living and the dead, He may receive us unto himself, and where He is, we may be also. And to Him, with the

Father and the Holy Ghost, be all praise might, majesty, and dominion, for eve and ever.

SERMON X.

LOVE THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW.

ROMANS, xiii. 10.

"*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour;*
"*therefore love is the fulfilling of*
"*the law.*"

THIS is one of many sentences in Scripture where a great deal is contained in a little, and which, when thoroughly understood, may be received as an axiom, or a

maxim of truth. Admit the position, and the consequence is clear and undeniable.

The words themselves appear chiefly to relate to the duties subsisting amongst the whole human race, and that one man owes to another — let his country, or his religion, or his situation, or rank in life be what it may. And which, for the sake of distinction, has been called the moral law. You will perceive the distinction I mean, in the two tables of the decalogue or ten commandments. The first five of which are nearly confined to the duty we immediately owe to God. The fifth indeed notices the honour and obedience that is due to our parents. But this is so paramount, and so supereminent above every other relation in life; and bears such an affinity to the reverence which we owe to

the Almighty as our common parent; that it may well be put into the scale of our duty to Him, or of our more direct religious obligations. A precept so highly regarded by St. Paul, that he recommends it to the notice of the Ephesians as "the "first commandment with promise." (ch. vi. 2.) The second table, or the last five of the commandments, comprise the social duties respecting our intercourse with each other. St. Paul, in this part of his epistle to the Romans on which we are discoursing, has made the same distinction, which I shall bring to your observation by and by.

But moral obligations, or the duties particularly relative to mankind, are a part, or a branch of the law of God They have the same root and foundation

as our direct obedience to God. And therefore, although they may be distinguished, as I have said, for precision's sake, they can never be separated according to the rules of justice or propriety. Our blessed Saviour has combined them. And this sufficiently offers them to us, with an equal weight as to our acceptance or decision. Upon being asked by a certain lawyer, "What was the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto "him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God "with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, "and with all thy mind. This is the first "and great commandment. And the "second is like unto it; that is, equivalent "to it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as "thyself. On these two commandments "hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt. xxii. 35, &c.) Thus condensing

the whole of the commandments into two; and observing that there was a similarity between them by which they were entitled to an equal share of our estimation.

It will be found then, that the whole of our duty as men and as Christians, is to be resolved into our observance of these two divine precepts of our love towards God, and towards our neighbour. And in this respect it is to be said, that "love "is the fulfilling of the law." But I must endeavour to show you this more fully.

Our love of God is a solid devout attachment to his service, arising from a due contemplation and conviction of our unavoidable dependence upon Him, and of the mercies which we have received from Him. "We love him," says St.

John, " because He first loved us." And the only way we have of showing our love of God — the only practical and unequivocal proof we can give of it, is by our obedience to his holy law. " For this is " the love of God," says the same apostle, " that we keep his commandments." (1 John, iv. 19. v. 3.) The love of our neighbour, or as it is very frequently expressed in the Scriptures, of each other, arises from a consideration of the connection that subsists between all mankind. Not only, I repeat, as being the children, the creatures, the servants, of the same Almighty and universal Parent — or the offspring of one earthly parent; but as having the same natural endowments and propensities, though in various degrees — the same hopes, and the same fears — the same excitements to the enjoyment of the

present world, and the same expectation or desire of future happiness.

The love of each other arises also from reflections upon that social intercourse for which we were undoubtedly created, and for which we are so amply and so variously fitted. So that there is no possibility of admitting such a notion, as that any one man can maintain a rational existence, independent of his fellow-men. Every human being is indebted, in a greater or a less degree, for every particle of his present enjoyment, to that union by which the whole race are bound together. Every human being is our brother and our neighbour. All which you know, was beautifully and pathetically illustrated by our holy Redeemer, in his parable of the man that fell among thieves; which you

will find in the 10th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. And it is considerations of this nature, which ought to lay aside, and to bury for ever in oblivion, every kind of prejudice with regard to any difference of "nation, kindred, people, or tongues.*

But alas! by the wilful perversion of God's designs, and by the thoughtless or obstinate infringement of his laws, that union to which we are instructed by the voice of nature and of religion to look for our greatest happiness in this present world, often becomes the source of our greatest misery. If the intentions of the Almighty were not wickedly and wantonly frustrated by ourselves — if his law were not carelessly or presumptuously broken;

* Rev. v. 9. vii. 9.

if our love to Him were kept unimpaired, this could not be the case. It is to the blind persuasions of self-interest — it is to the deceitfulness of man to man — it is to the misguided views of ambition, of pride, and of envy — in short, it is to the shameful neglect of God's law, natural, religious, and moral, that we must attribute by far the greater part of the disquietudes and mischiefs of the present life. And by which, let me add, that the eternal salvation of our souls is endangered. And this brings me more closely to the words which I have chosen for my subject. "Love worketh no ill to his neigh- "bour, therefore love is the fulfilling of "the law." Not merely of the moral or social law, but of the law of God altogether.

With regard to the moral law, we are commanded, not only to love one another, but to love our neighbour, or each other, as ourselves. "Owe no man any thing," says St. Paul, "but to love one another; "for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled "the law." For this," or with reference to this injunction, "Thou shalt not com- "mit adultery — thou shalt not kill — "thou shalt not steal — thou shall not "bear false witness — thou shalt not "covet. And if there be any other com- "mandment, it is briefly comprehended "in this saying, thou shalt love thy neigh- "bour as thyself." (v. 8, 9.)

Here you see is that allusion of the apostle's, which I mentioned to you, to what is called the second table; or the moral law. And you will perceive is a

succinct explanation of the original proposition or injunction. For will he who loves his brother, or his neighbour, or his fellow-man, or his fellow-christian, commit any action that will destroy his peace of mind, by the indulgence of an unjustifiable passion, or for the sake of momentary gratification? Will he who loves his neighbour, become his murderer? Will he who loves his neighbour, practice the arts of deceit against him, by taking an unfair advantage of him in the way of commerce, or by what is called over-reaching him — will he cheat him, or rob him, or defraud him of his property in any way, for the sake of a temporary, and perhaps an insignificant advantage to himself? Will he who loves his neighbour attempt his ruin by perjury? or will he wantonly traduce his character by slander, or by maliciously

propagating tales to his discredit, or by framing or retailing lies that shall sink his reputation and embitter all his prospects? Will he who loves his neighbour, seek to deprive him of any of his comforts, or look with an envious eye upon any of his possessions, for the sake of feeding his own grasping avaricious disposition? Surely not. He who can act thus — he who can fill so injurious a part as to be guilty of breaking any one of these commandments, can never be said to love his neighbour. "For love worketh no ill to "his neighbour, therefore love is the ful- "filling of the law."

But we are not to stop here; our intercourse with the world, and the principles of religion and of morality require more of us than this. The duties that have

hitherto been mentioned, are rather negative or passive, than active or exemplary. It is not enough that we abstain from doing ill to our fellow-creatures — but if we wish to fulfil the purport of our creation, and to glorify God by the exercise of those perfections which were infused into us, and by maintaining that likeness to Him in which we were made, we must do all the good to mankind that is in our power. We must remember, I repeat, that we are exhorted not only to love each other, but to love each other as ourselves: that is, as far as the laws of society are concerned. Thus we are to bear with the infirmities of each other; to be compassionate to the errors and failings of each other — to give assistance to those that need it, according to our abilities — to help forward the honest views and endeavours of our fellow-

creatures — to bind up the wounds of the broken-hearted, and to give comfort to the afflicted — to perform offices of friendship and brotherly kindness — and, in short, to follow what has justly been called the golden rule of Christianity, by doing to others, upon all occasions, what we would wish them to do to us, under like circumstances, or in the same situation. To do less than this, is to do less than our duty, it is to do less than God has commanded, or than the bonds of society have a right to exact; and to be deficient in that love which is made the completion of our religious obedience.

For it is still to be further observed, that the love of our neighbour is the natural fruit of the love of God; and according to the language of St. John, one is the crite-

rion of the other. For " whoso," says this apostle, " hath this world's good, and " seeth his brother have need, and shut- " teth up his bowels of compassion from " him, how dwelleth the love of God in " *him ?*" (1 John, iii. 17.) Christ also has made it the peculiar badge of our profession — leaving it in a most emphatical manner, among his last injunctions, as a kind of legacy to his followers. " A *new* " commandment I give unto you, that ye " love one another: as I have loved you, " that ye also love one another." He calls it *new*, as being now more clearly expressed, and more absolutely enjoined than it had been under the old law; or because things are often called new, on account of their extraordinary excellence and usefulness; or as being the exact counterpart of his own perfect example—

and therefore carrying with it a recommendation that had never before belonged exclusively to any commandment — and because it was meant to be extended to a greater length than any rule of the same kind had embraced before; and to the inculcation of a duty, in which many of the Jews were notoriously deficient; and to which the prejudices of too many of the present day, Christians as well as Jews, will hardly suffer them to conform — even to the love of our enemies.

But he adds, "by this shall all men "know that ye are my disciples, if ye "have love one to another." (John, xiii. 34, 35.) So that as the servants or children of God, and more peculiarly as members of Christ's Church, we are under the strongest obligations, and the most

solemn engagements, to fulfil this law of brotherly affection, or of love one towards another.

What more can be said to recommend, or to enhance the value of this necessary, amiable, and beneficial quality? a quality, of which God himself is the pattern, and the great exemplar. For "God," as says St. John, "is love." A quality which the same apostle has described, with a figurative strength of expression, as the immediate and undeniable fruit of the spirit. "If we love one another, God dwelleth "in us, and his love is perfected in us. "Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, "and He in us — because He hath given "us of his spirit." (1 John, iv. 12, 13, 16.) And hence our Saviour gives the following lesson to the obdurate Jews, by observing

to them, "ye have heard that it hath been "said, thou shalt love thy neighbour, and "hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, "love your enemies — bless them that "curse you — do good to them that hate "you — and pray for them that despite-"fully use you, and persecute you. That "ye may be the children of your father "who is in heaven. For He maketh his "sun to rise on the evil and on the good; "and sendeth rain on the just and on the "unjust." Or as St. Luke has it, "Love "ye your enemies; and do good, and "lend, hoping for nothing again: and "your reward shall be great, and ye shall "be the children of the highest. For *He* "is kind unto the unthankful, and to the "evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your "Father also is merciful." (Matt. v. 45. Luke vi. 35, 36.) I trust I have in some

degree explained the nature and the duty of that love towards each other, which is said to be the fulfilling of the law.

Perhaps, if any thing more may be added, it may be by extending the sense of it a little, and warning you against that conduct or behaviour which may be most likely to interrupt it.

It may indeed with truth be acknowledged, that the absence of evil is a state of enjoyment and happiness; and to do no ill to our neighbour is a negative way of doing him good. It leaves him at least in the possession of peace and tranquillity, as far as we are concerned. But the religion of Christ calls us to a more direct and active discharge of our duty. We are to let our light shine before men,

that they may be stimulated by our good works which they shall behold, to participate with us in the glory and praise of our Heavenly Father. And if we love our neighbour, as that doctrine is displayed in the Gospel, we shall be as desirous of promoting his eternal welfare, as of administering to his temporal exigences. And much good may be done in this way, by a judicious and familiar communication. By good example, and by wholsome advice — by the help of instruction, and by imparting to others a share of our own knowledge and experience, as opportunities may offer. Thus of the blessed Jesus it is said, that "He "went about doing good" — not only by healing the diseases and infirmities of those that surrounded him, but by showing forth the perfection of every human

virtue, by opening their understanding — and by making plain the paths of righteousness. So that wherever He went, the kingdom of heaven was emphatically said to be at hand, or to go along with Him.

Nor can I here forbear to notice the display of that love towards God and towards mankind, which has of late burst forth in the zealous endeavours to disseminate God's holy word, which will be found to contain every thing that is valuable to man — and in that attention which has been also paid to the minds of the rising generation. It is a truly godlike and a Christian act of charity, another expression for love; of which, let us hope that they who have begun, will not relax, or become weary.

In short, whatever has a tendency to spread the glory of God, and to lift the mind of man towards Him, is a species of that love, which, as my text says, "is "the fulfilling of the law."

Permit me, in few words, to guard you against that conduct which may counteract, or interrupt this blessed and benevolent principle.

And in the foremost rank stands Pride —that destroyer of all social happiness— that determined foe to our own peace. For certainly none are more miserable at times than the proud. The scorn, the contempt, the neglect, and overbearing insolence they show to others, is sure to be returned with interest; and leaves them little reason to expect the friendship, or

respect, or esteem of their fellow-creatures. They can be little acquainted with the love of God or of man. For as the wise king remarks in his admirable book of Proverbs, "Every one that is "proud in heart is an abomination to the "Lord: though hand join in hand, he "shall not be unpunished." (ch. xvi. 5.) And the indignation of man is sure to be directed against him. The proud man cannot possibly be free from the charge of doing ill to his neighbour—since nothing is more true than a similar remark by the same acute and experienced observer—that "he that is of a proud heart "stirreth up strife." (Prov. ii. 25.) And "the beginning of strife," says he, "is as "when one letteth out water." (ch. xvii. 14.) So difficult is it to stop, and so

many inroads will it make upon the peace of society.

Again, the passion of envy and love can never inhabit the same breast. And he who is so discontented with his own lot, as that he cannot behold the ease or prosperity of another without envy, will hardly refrain from showing some marks of his malignant and unhappy disposition. Self-love, self-interest, and self-conceit, are equally bars to the love of mankind; and will never rest satisfied without some offensive token of partiality or assumed superiority.

But as in many cases the most trifling apparent causes produce the most mischievous effects—so in this, it is not the most glaring or the most atrocious crimes

that are the greatest disturbers of universal love and amity. The adulterer, the murderer, and the notorious thief, are solitary beings, of a short duration, and in a contracted sphere of action; compared with the habitual assassin of character and reputation—the slanderer, the back-biter, and the tale-bearer.

This is enough to show you the many and the various enemies that there are to the love of mankind. But let us draw a veil over these blemishes in human nature; and remember the power that God has given us of sustaining a more generous, a more honourable, and a better part. If we cannot do our neighbour all the good we would wish, let us recollect that we may at least refrain from doing

any ill to him. Though if we search the catalogue of human possibility, we shall find that the power of doing good is, perhaps at all times, greater than we may imagine.

I will conclude the subject with the language and advice of the great and inspired Apostle. "Let all bitterness, and "wrath, and anger, and clamour, and "evil-speaking, be put away from you, "with all malice. And be ye kind one "to another, tender-hearted, forgiving "one another, even as God, for Christ's "sake, hath forgiven you." (Eph. iv. 31, 32.)

And now unto Him who "loved us, "and sent his Son to be the propitiation

" for our sins"—(1 John, iv. 10.) To God our Creator, Sanctifier, and Redeemer, be all glory, praise, and thanksgiving, for ever and ever.

SERMON XI.

ON PUBLIC WORSHIP AND THE HONOUR DUE TO GOD.

1 Tim. i. 17.

"*Now unto the King Eternal, Im-*
"*mortal, Invisible, the only wise*
"*God, be honour and glory for*
"*ever and ever.*"

Such is the nature of man, that we almost universally find what is called natural religion stampt upon his mind. The con-

viction and acknowledgment of a superior, invisible Being—A Being possessed of infinite wisdom, and unlimited power—A Being, by whom the world was made, as we behold it, and consequently who was prior to everything that we behold. A Being, upon whom the direction, and government, and continuation of every thing we see must depend—for this naturally follows the power of creation.

If we look into the minutest work of the creation, we shall find it totally above our comprehension—but we shall find enough to excite our wonder and admiration—we shall perceive a beauty, a perfection, a wisdom, which no art of man can imitate—no strength of investigation or enquiry can reach

If we attempt to conceive the whole of creation, the imagination becomes lost — the extent of the Creator's power is incalculable—we can have no idea of infinity, either with regard to space or time. But from what we do see and know, we have sufficient evidence, I repeat, of an extent of knowledge, and wisdom, and power, and goodness, to command our veneration, and to claim our obedience.

Thus the words of the text are in conformity with the voice of nature. "Unto "the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, "the only wise God, be honour and "glory, for ever and ever." To which the Apostle adds, "Amen." Be it so. In this the whole race of Adam are agreed—Here is no dissention. The con-

viction and the acknowledgment are universal. But in the *signs* or *proof* of this conviction and acknowledgment, the pride, the folly, and the wickedness of man's heart, may truly be said to "have sought "out many inventions." (Eccles. vii. 29.)

None, at least few, are mad enough to deny that the great author of our being is worthy to receive honour and glory. But many are weak enough to describe his attributes according to the direction of their own perverse imperfect imaginations. Many are disposed to circumscribe his power—to set bounds to his knowledge—to entertain doubts of his goodness—they would fain bring them down to a level with their own understanding—and make them subservient to their own evil dispositions. Their propensities are to be in-

dulged—their senses are to be gratified—their wishes are to be obtained—their passions are to be uncontrouled—and with these incongruous exceptions and limitations, the attributes of the Deity are to be allowed. But this can never be deemed the judgment of a rational creature, whose first and highest wisdom it is to acknowledge his utter dependence upon the hand that formed him. When I say, dependence, I would be understood to mean a consciousness that every thing respecting this world, and all the events of life, are the effects of those perfect attributes which belong solely to God. Dependence therefore is closely allied to reliance. On that power, upon which we wholly depend, to which we are indebted for our existence, and for every possible good, or comfort we experience, it is our wis-

dom to rely. All that He has ordained—all that He has commanded, all that He permits, must have been with a good intention. To Him then, as is most due, be all honour and glory. And in what manner God may be said to receive honour and glory from the works of His hands, especially from us men and Christians, shall be the subject of our present enquiry.

A solution to any question of this kind may be given in very few words—for God is honoured by the works of the creation, in proportion as they fulfil the purposes for which they were created. And these purposes are to be ascertained by the properties or qualities that are attached to them. Let us understand that honour and praise are the same thing; or at least they are of the same nature. Whatever

is deemed honourable, is deemed praiseworthy; and to whomsoever we ascribe honour, to him we subjoin praise. Though it must be observed, that among men upon earth, both honour and praise are often sadly perverted, and are often bestowed upon objects altogether unworthy of them. But the works of the Creation reflect honour and praise and glory upon the Almighty Creator, by the perfection, the beauty, the wisdom and mercy that is so indisputably displayed in them. Even inanimate things—things without life, show forth the honour and glory of God. The heavens declare his glory—the elements proclaim the honour due unto his name—"Fire and hail," as says the Psalmist, "snow and vapours—wind and "storm, fulfilling his word—mountains and "all hills; fruitful trees and all cedars."

The same is with reason applied to irrational creatures—" Beasts and all cattle, " worms and feathered fowls. All thy " works praise thee, O Lord! (Ps. cxlviii. " And thy saints," adds the Psalmist, " give thanks unto thee." (Ps. cxlv.) That is, just, devout, holy people are ready to acknowledge thy power and supremacy, and to offer thee their bounden praise and thanksgiving. For shall man alone be exempt from these general observations? Is man the only part of the creation which shall refuse to give honour and glory to Him who formed him? Shall we, who perceive ourselves sensible of his might and greatness, deny Him the tribute of praise? How then shall *we* answer the purpose for which we were created. To what use shall we put the knowledge and the faculties with which

we are so wonderfully furnished, the endowments of the mind, and the peculiarly distinguishing faculty of speech, if we do not endeavour to turn them to the honour and glory of that eternal, invisible Being, by whom they have been vouchsafed?—If we do not endeavour to fulfil the word, or the will of God, as far as we are able? And in what way shall we perform this undeniable duty? Not surely by silent acknowledgment alone — for this would not be exerting all our powers, this would not be making a proper use of all the light, all the knowledge and understanding, with which we have been so clearly and so wonderfully provided. Worship, adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and prayer—these are the means afforded us. These are the dictates and the impulses of our very nature, implanted and instilled into

us by the God of nature. And therefore if we oppose them, and reject the use of them, we positively act contrary to our nature—we despise the wisdom of God—we voluntarily and perversely turn the light that is in us into darkness. Not publicly to worship, to adore, to praise the great Author of our being—not to avow our thankfulness for the innumerable blessings that surround us—not to acknowledge our inferiority and dependence—is to withhold from God the honour and glory for which He has a right to look to us—and for which He has a just claim upon us; because He has both enabled and commanded us to give it—because we know that it is our duty to give it. How shall we pretend to justify a neglect of this kind? What shall we say in excuse for such refusal? Or what can we ima-

gine will be the consequence of such obstinacy and folly, such conceited arrogance, such undeniable ingratitude; if not the just indignation and wrath of an offended Deity? "O consider this, ye "that forget God, lest He pluck you "away, and there be none to deliver "you." (Ps. l. 22.)

The Scriptures are full of examples of that worship which it becomes us to offer to the immortal, invisible, and only wise God. And reason and conscience, if they have fair liberty of acting, will concur with them.

"O go your way into his gates with "thanksgiving, and into his courts with "praise; be thankful unto him, and "speak good of his name. (Ps. c.) O

" come, let us worship, and *fall down*, " and *kneel* before the Lord our maker." Let us own submission and subjection to Him. (xcv. 6.) " Tell it out among the " heathen that the Lord is king, and that " it is He that hath made the round world " so fast, that it cannot be moved; and " how that He shall judge the people " righteously." (xcvi. 10.)

By public worship then, public praise, and thanksgiving, and by public avowal of our sentiments, in the first place, we are bound to give honour and glory to God. Silent, tacit acknowledgment is no worship—private, secluded adoration, however necessary and consolatory it may be, is not a full and suitable return for the glorious manifestations of God's mercies that surround us—it is not that clear indication of the heart, which, if it be

sincere, will urge the mouth to speak, and the tongue to proclaim.—" I have " declared thy righteousness in the great " congregation; lo, I will not refrain my " lips, O Lord, and that thou knowest. " I have not hid thy righteousness within " my heart; my talk hath been of thy " truth, and of thy salvation. I have " not kept back thy loving mercy and " truth from the great congregation." (Ps. xl. 11, &c.) This is the simple natural language of gratitude, it merely bespeaks a sense—but a very laudable sense, of obligation. It is what proud, weak, capricious men require one of another. Surely the God of heaven may be supposed to require the same. No mind that is warmly devoted to God, will be satisfied with the equivocal testimony of a religion that utterly excludes the use

of public rites and ceremonies, of public praise and thanksgiving. The altar and the offering are coeval with the earliest ages of the world. We know how seriously and repeatedly a reverence for the sanctuary was impressed upon God's chosen people by their inspired prophets. We know the example and the precepts which Christ has left us, with regard to our hallowing the temple. We know the ritual devotion which He established—the peculiar institutions which He ordained for the preservation of the religion He has taught us. And I leave it to your own minds to decide, how far we can do honour to God, according to the understanding and abilities and instructions, which He has given us, without the observance of public worship. The truth is, it is a duty that scarcely requires the

help of argument to show the justice and propriety of it.

In the next place, if we would fulfil the intent and purpose of our creation, we are bound to do honour to God our maker, by the holiness, the purity, and the uprightness of our lives. By reflecting those perfections of the Deity which are stampt upon our minds. For it is in this intellectual sense that we are said to have been formed in his image and likeness.*

Passions we have, in common with the whole part of the animal creation—other passions we have peculiar to the race of mankind — arising from the various conditions of man, and from the various

* Ad similitudinem enim Deo propius accedebat humana virtus, quam figura. CIC. DE NAT. D—

connections of society. We are surrounded by numberless objects which excite particular desires; and which lead to particular wishes. But we have reason and conscience as the guides and directors of the whole.

God, we know, is the perfection of purity, of holiness, of wisdom, of justice, of mercy, and of benevolence. "The "Lord is righteous in all his ways; and "holy in all his works. The Lord is "gracious and merciful, long-suffering, "and of great goodness. The Lord is "loving unto every man, and his mercy "is over all his works." (Ps. cxlv.) It is in these qualities and attributes that we are bound to imitate the Deity—for it is in the power to do so that our likeness to Him consists. Thus Christ calls upon us

to " be merciful, as our Almighty Father " is merciful." (Luke vi. 36.) " And to " be perfect, as our Father who is in hea- " ven is perfect." (Matt. v. 48.)

Let us recollect the capacity we have to discern between good and evil. We are not ignorant of the difference between piety and profligacy, and between virtue and vice. We know well enough what it is to be just, and honest, and sincere, and decent, and friendly, and charitable. We can perceive the beauty and the profitableness of sobriety, of industry, of humility, of brotherly kindness, and of benevolence. We know it is the practice of these virtues, these truly Christian graces, that constitutes the happiness of society —and we are assured that we cannot be individually happy, but in proportion as

we endeavour to practise them. We are persuaded that God intended we should be happy. How then shall we fulfil the purpose of our creation—how shall we reflect honour upon the hand that made us, but by conforming to his designs, and by a determined perseverance in such conduct as we know will be approved in his sight? In short, how shall we be said to answer the end of our formation, but by the proper and full exertion of those powers of which we find ourselves possessed? Why is every kind of impiety—why is every species of sin and of vice, said to be disgraceful? Why is the common thief, the cheat, the liar, abhorred and shunned? Why are the relentless, the unforgiving, the illiberal, the unfeeling, and the uncharitable, despised and censured? Because they over-

look or pervert the prime gifts of nature, and depart from that path, which, if they would consult their own hearts, they would be convinced that God had enabled them to tread.

Thus then we honour our Maker by the uprightness, the integrity, and purity of our lives — thus we show forth and maintain a resemblance to that perfect image in which we are said to have been created. And this, as far as it goes, is what the Apostle calls "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father." (James i. 27.) This is to worship God in spirit and in truth. And without this, all external ceremonial worship is fruitless and unavailing.

The same method of arguing may be

applied to every disposition, and to every operation of the human mind. To the degree of wisdom, of knowledge, of prudence and discretion which we shall be found either to encourage or to neglect. God is not honoured by ignorance or by folly. Neither can they be excuseable, nor thought deserving of pardon, unless they can be proved to be absolutely unavoidable. I have only mentioned this, as an exhortation to all to make the best use of the sense and understanding which God has given them. And I wish I were able to convince all, that it is their indispensable duty to do so. The whole of the doctrine is comprised in one short sentence of St. Paul's — "Whatsoever ye "do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor. x. 31.) This is the design of our present existence, and a design that will undoubt-

edly be carried on through the ceaseless ages of futurity. "Unto the King Eter- "nal, Immortal, Invisible, the only wise "God, be honour and glory for ever and "ever."

There is therefore a further consideration of which we require frequently to be reminded; and that is, the likeness we bear to God in our immortal nature. They who have glorified God on earth, by a uniform obedience to his will, according to their several abilities, may indulge a just expectation, upon the truth of Christ's Gospel, that they shall be admitted to join in his praise, in a world of eternal and uninterrupted happiness. It is this that stamps a true value upon our religious obedience, and which lifts the soul far above the imperfections, the in-

equalities, and the disquietudes that are attached to our present state of probation.

Let us, in the last place, turn our minds to the honour and glory that may be said to redound to the author of our being, from the divine revelation of his will, which it has been his wisdom and mercy to vouchsafe us. For this purpose we have only to behold the superiority, in every respect, of those persons, who have accepted and followed the doctrines and precepts contained in that revelation with purity and sincerity.

Our judgment is not to be directed by the opinions of any man, or any set of men; but solely by an acquaintance with the revelation itself. Let us study that—

and with this criterion for our guide, let us see if there is any state or condition of man that will not be rendered better, and more completely happy, by an implicit adherence to the religion of Jesus Christ, than it can possibly be without it. The religion of Christ has introduced a sanctity, a purity, and a rational mode of worship, never before seen in the world. It has laid idolatry and superstition at its feet, and has taught us that there is only one God, and that He only is to be served. Wherever the influence of Christ's religion is felt, it softens and ameliorates the heart—and by making the purity of the heart its first object, it strikes at the root of those numberless vices and follies which disturb the peace of mankind. It insists upon sincerity and truth, and leaves no room for prevarication, for partial exceptions, for



self-love, or for what is called mental reservation. It has broken down the partition-wall between Jew and Gentile,* and calls upon the whole race of mankind to unite as brethren, and to live in unity and godly love.

By the appearance and character, and by the power manifested in Jesus Christ, an immediate communication was opened between us and our Almighty Creator—whom we are invited to consider as our common father, as our constant friend and benefactor.† There are frequent indications and assertions of this nature to be found in the Gospel, which excite the

* Ep. ii. 14.

† Ideo se patefecit Deus voce, misso Filio, ut conspiceretur in carne, ut hunc Filium in precatione intueamur, et de Patre admoneamur. MELANCTHON.

mind to piety, to a love of God, and to the practice of those heavenly virtues of which Christ has given us a perfect example.

It is to this unparalleled transcendent pattern of all excellence that the devout worshipper of God is to look, as to a guide for the whole of his life. Here he perceives that the true spirit of devotion is to do the will of his heavenly Father. Here he discovers the amiableness, and the possibility of practising those virtues which secure the present peace and happiness of society, and of each individual. Here he learns that the just, the pure, the humble, the patient, the forgiving, the merciful, the charitable, and the benevolent, obtain their immediate reward in the

tranquillity and satisfaction of their own breasts. And here also he is taught to look forward to that state of everlasting happiness, which, upon the most unanswerable testimonies, is laid before him.

Show me a persuasion that will produce these effects, or any one of them, with that certainty which is the exclusive characteristic of Christ's religion. Show me where a firm trust and confidence in this religion has failed in these respects—And if no such instances are to be found—persuaded as I am that they never yet have been found—let me exhort you to "hold fast the profession of your faith "without wavering"—Let us give honour and glory to God by a firm and stedfast perseverance in the doctrines of that revelation which He has given us.

The formalities, or rather the forms of religion—by which I mean the temple, the altar, and the priest—these are secondary considerations; and are of no other value abstractedly than as they are instrumental to its preservation. But they are so clearly, and so indispensably necessary, as to have been made a part of the religion itself. And God, who has taught us by Prophets, by Apostles, and by Christ our Redeemer, that the source of true devotion is in the heart, has also taught and commanded us, by the same inspired instructors, to hallow the sabbath, and to reverence the sanctuary.

" Ye shall observe this thing for an " ordinance to thee, and to thy sons for " ever." (Ex. xii. 24.)—was the command of God respecting the passover,

which was to be observed as a memorial of his signal mercies to the children of Israel. "This do in remembrance of "me," (Luke, xxii. 19.) was the last injunction of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, attached to a memorial of the special mercies of God through Him to all mankind. Reject these memorials—abandon the use of these institutions—shut up the temple—forego the solemn instrumental rites of religion — and I appeal to your own understandings and consciences, assured that reflection will convince you, how soon the world would relapse into all the ignorance, the idolatry, the superstition and profligacy, which it has been the design of Divine Wisdom and Mercy by a divine and inspired revelation to subdue. A design which has never failed of being fulfilled, in proportion as

that revelation has been received and obeyed with sincerity.

If then we would do honour to God as rational creatures and as Christians, it must be by public worship, that is, by public acknowledgment and praise — by the sanctity and integrity of our lives — and by an humble and impartial unequivocal reliance upon that redemption which God has promised us through Jesus Christ. And in this manner may we continue to unite with the holy Apostle, and say — "Unto the King Eternal, Immortal, "Invisible, the only wise God, be ho- "nour and glory for ever and ever."

SERMON XII.

ON PRIVATE DEVOTION AND PRAYER.

MATT. xiv. 14, 23.

" *And when he had sent the multitude*
" *away, he went up into a mountain*
" *apart, to pray.*"

EVERY notion which we can form of the Almighty Creator, must naturally incline a religious mind to prayer. It is a devotional exercise that can hardly be separated from a due reflection upon those

blessings which we have already received from God, and upon those which we hope to enjoy through his mercy in a future state. If we should speak of it as a duty, we can need no other argument than the example of Jesus Christ, who was a perfect pattern of all excellence; of every virtue that God requires at the hand of man, and who, as he affirmed of himself, "came down from Heaven, not to do his "own will, but the will of him that sent "him." (John, vi. 38.) Meaning, in one sense, for the sake of example — for the sake of showing mankind what they were capable of doing, and what they must necessarily do, if they would secure eternal happiness. Otherwise, the will of Christ must in all respects have been coincident with the will of God. Since all that he spoke, and every thing that he

did, was by the guidance and power of God's holy spirit.

Our Lord then, having been engaged in the instruction of a great concourse of people, who came out of the neighbouring cities to hear him; and to whom he manifested the præternatural power which dwelt within him, by healing their infirmities, and by miraculously administering to their sustenance — "When he had sent "the multitude away, he went up into a "mountain apart, to pray." By which we are not merely taught the expediency of prayer, but are particularly shown the propriety of private prayer — of choosing moments for a secluded and serious communication with God, and with our own hearts.

Our minds indeed may, and ought to be at all times possessed of such notions of God, and of the duty we owe Him, as will influence our conduct in the more material concerns of this present life. But the love of God, and of religion, seems to require something more than this; for faint and transitory at the best, are those impressions, which are suffered to mix with the necessary and common avocations of the world. A religious person will scarcely rest satisfied with that passing desultory recollection of his Heavenly Father and Protector — of his Judge and his Redeemer, which the multiplicity of worldly engagements will allow. If our lives are to be made correspondent to the will of God, if we are sincerely desirous of maintaining a uniform attachment to his service, to recommend

ourselves to his continual favour — and to be fortified against the numerous temptations to which we are liable — we shall perceive the wisdom of the Psalmist's advice, of taking frequent opportunities to "commune with our own hearts, when "we are in our chamber, and are still"* —when we can indulge our thoughts without distraction, and without interruption. When we can lift up our hearts to the throne of grace, with a warmth of devotion that cannot be doubted; and with a zeal that cannot be subject to the imputation of hypocrisy.

Besides, the subjects of our petitions are not always so decisively weighed in public — even in those places that are

* Psalm, iv. 4.

appointed for the public demonstration of God's glory; as when retirement and solitude leave us to the full exercise of serious deliberation and reflection. Therefore said Christ, "when thou prayest, "enter into thy closet — and when thou "hast shut thy door, pray to thy father "who is in secret, and thy Father, who "seeth in secret, shall reward thee "openly." (Matt. vi. 6.) Thus we have a command, or an exhortation for the observance of private prayer, as well as an example, given us by our Lord and Saviour — who, it is to be remembered, fully exemplified every part of his doctrine.

I have said, that prayer, and I would be understood to speak particularly of private prayer, is a devotional exercise

which will naturally, and to this I will add, which will reasonably, present itself to every sincere worshipper of God. In support of this suggestion, I will in the first place remind you, that it is a duty which has been universally practised.

There is scarcely a person mentioned in sacred history, whose example and piety deserves to be noticed; of whom it is not recorded, that secluded adoration and prayer made a part of his religious duty. Whether we look to what is related of patriarchs, of rulers, of those of any eminence in life, or of those of the more common or general condition; we shall find none of them neglectful of paying to God the tribute of private adoration, and of avowing their trust and dependence upon

Him by acts of private and humble supplication.

A few instances must suffice; and it alters not the case, if the subjects that employed their meditations were often of a public nature — as being concerned with the state or nation to which they belonged — since they themselves were closely connected with the welfare of that state or nation.

Thus Isaac is represented, in the 24th chapter of Genesis, as "going out to "meditate in the field at the eventide." (v. 63.) To meditate, as it is rendered in our translation, but which also signifies, to pray — to praise God — to contemplate the Deity. Nehemiah, meditating upon the unhappy fate of Jerusalem, expresses

himself in the following devout manner. " And it came to pass, when I heard these " words, that I sat down and wept, and " mourned certain days, and fasted, and " prayed before the God of Heaven. " And I said, I beseech thee, O Lord " God of Heaven, the great and terrible " God, that keepeth covenant and mercy " for them that love him, and observe his " commandments: let thine ear now be " attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou " mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, " which I pray before thee now, day and " night, for the children of Israel thy " servants, and confess the sins of the " children of Israel, which we have sin- " ned against thee." &c. &c. (Neh. i. 4, &c. &c.) It is a remarkable address to the Almighty throughout. The good king Hezechiah being severely afflicted with

sickness, applied in private to the God of Heaven for relief — and his prayer was heard. (2 Kings, xx. 2, &c.)

But let me keep to what I more particularly and distinctly wish to notice, and that is, the constant habitual custom of holding communion with God in private prayer.

It is said of Daniel, that "he retired to "his chamber, and kneeled upon his "knees three times a-day, and prayed, "and gave thanks before his God." (ch. vi. 10.) It alludes indeed to a particular occasion — but then is added, "as he did "aforetime," which proves that it was his custom.

"O thou that hearest prayer," says the

royal Psalmist, "to thee shall all flesh "come." (Ps. lxv. 2.) And again, "as "for me, I will call upon God, and the "Lord shall save me. In the evening, "and at morning, and at noon-day will I "pray, and that instantly: and he shall "hear my voice." (Ps. lv. 17, 18.) A very large portion of the Psalms of David undoubtedly appear to have been the fervent effusions of a mind employed in private meditation and prayer.

In the 10th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, Cornelius the centurion is spoken of as "a devout man, and one "that feared God with all his house; who "gave much alms to the people, and "prayed to God alway." (ch. x. 2.) In the same chapter it is related of St. Peter, that "he went up upon the house-top to

" pray, about the sixth hour." (v. 9.) The Jews having stated times for the observance of private devotion.

St. Paul's advice to the Philippians was —" Be careful for nothing — but in every " thing by prayer and supplication with " thanksgiving, let your requests be made " known unto God." (ch. iv. 6.) And to Timothy the same Apostle writes, upon the subject of superstitious abstinence recommended by some — that " every crea- " ture of God is good, and nothing to be " refused, if it be received with thanks- " giving. For it is sanctified by the word " of God and prayer." (1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.)

This is enough to show the sense of private prayer which was entertained by those of old time, who deserved and ob-

tained the character of persons devoted to the service of God.

The general history of mankind, will furnish abundant examples of the same nature. And in the houses of the more opulent, there always have been, and still remain, in most parts of Europe, their separate oratories, or chambers set apart for the purpose of daily religious meditation, reflection, and holy communion with God, the Father of the universe. Our own country, God be praised, is very far from wanting testimonies in favour of the duty in question. And among those too who have been engaged in the most public concerns of life, and who were not to be placed in the number of the superstitious, the fanatical, or enthusiastic. But who were firmly persuaded that virtuous habits

and mental happiness were to be looked for in those only, whose hearts were warmly attached to God, and to religion. Several examples are in my recollection, with the recital of which I am sure you would be gratified. But I fear I should trespass upon your time if I were to exceed the mention of two, which, for their devout simplicity and energy, I cannot forbear laying before you. One is an extract from a letter of Sir Henry Sidney, the bosom friend and companion of our young and pious King Edward the VI. to his son, afterwards known by the title of the great Sir Philip Sidney. "Let your "first action be the lifting up of your "mind to Almighty God, by hearty "prayer. And feelingly digest the words "you speak in prayer, with continual me-"ditation and thinking of Him to whom

" you pray; and of the matter for which " you pray. And use this at an ordinary " hour. Whereby the time itself will put " you in remembrance to do that, which " you are accustomed to do at that time." The other example is the advice which, as history informs us, " the most virtuous " and accomplished English nobleman in " the 17th century (the Earl of Strafford) " gave to his only son the day before he " suffered death — Serve God diligently, " morning and evening, and recommend " yourself unto Him, and have Him before " your eyes in all your ways."*

Such have been infinite numbers, in all ages, who did not deserve the name of bigots, nor of hypocrites, but whose whole

* Zouch's Life of Sir Philip Sidney.

lives marked the sincerity of their disposition and conviction, and whose souls no doubt have been united "to the spirits of "just men made perfect." (Heb. xii. 23.) I am not, however, recommending the practice of private devotion to you, because these persons used it. That would be saying little for the truth and great importance of the object — but I am rather showing you that they used it, because they were convinced it was proper. That you may judge, in some degree, of the worth of my argument, by knowing that persons of the greatest wisdom, of the most enlarged and liberal understanding, and of the most undissembled piety, have at all times been disposed to adopt it. This proves it to have been universal; and whatever custom is universal will, with perhaps very few exceptions, be

found to be natural — and as far as it is the object of deliberation, reasonable. For persons of great understanding and reflection, who seldom do any thing without some particular motive, or without deliberation — These very rarely suffer themselves to be led away by custom, or by prejudice, or by enthusiasm. Their habits and their lives will in general bear the strictest enquiry, and will deserve imitation.

If however *we* can persuade ourselves to reflect, to meditate upon the great invisible Author of Nature — and to think of the duty we owe Him as rational creatures; I trust we shall be convinced that the acknowledgment and worship of God ought not to rest solely upon the practice and example of mankind. Let us rather

hope, that our own notions of reverence and gratitude — that the consciousness of our own intellectual powers — and that a proper use of that sense which God has infused into our minds; will lead us to the pious exercise of such duties as God may naturally be supposed to require of us; and which we may as naturally be convinced that we are bound to fulfil.

Where then is the mind at ease, that can look round and behold this vast theatre of blessings and comforts, without feeling, and expressing thankfulness to the omnipotent and merciful Author of all things? Where is the mind distressed, that can look so readily and so surely for comfort, as to the all-merciful Director and Benefactor of Mankind? Where is the sin-

ner who does not at times feel the necessity of pardon and reconciliation?

But with what degree of reverence or decorum can any acknowledgment of gratitude be made to God — with what degree of seriousness can the afflicted seek relief from their heavenly Father — with what signs of penitence can the sinner implore for mercy; in short, how can any becoming recognition of an all-ruling Providence be made, in the multiplicity of worldly occupations?

Solomon has wisely indeed remarked, that "to every thing there is a season, and "a time to every purpose under the "heaven." (Eccles. iii. 1.) But if every portion of our time be given to this world, and none of it to God, what will become

of us, when this world shall have vanished away — or which is the same thing to us, when we shall be taken out of it, and when time shall be swallowed up in eternity. It is in retirement alone that the evils of life are to be mitigated by that reflection which our intercourse with the world will not allow. And that the errors of our lives are to be amended by that retrospection, and self-examination, which cannot be exercised but in moments of seclusion and solitude. It is in retirement alone that that acquaintance with God is to be sought and perfected, of which we shall all stand so much in need, when we are called upon to appear before Him.

If prayer were confined to thanksgiving and praise, every moment of our lives — every circumstance belonging to our na-

ture, will furnish us with motives for the exercise of those duties. "We ought," says a justly-celebrated writer,* "to "praise God publicly in the congregation "of the righteous, in the assemblies of "our fellow-christians, in our own fami- "lies also; and in our more private "retirement. When we wake in the "morning, our first thoughts are due to "Him, who hath raised us from the death "of sleep to a kind of new being, and "sends us out to our accustomed occupa- "tions; who took care of us whilst we "could do nothing for ourselves, and had "resigned up our senses, and lay lost in "silent forgetfulness.

"When the evening calls us to rest, the

* Jortin.

" dangers which we have escaped, the
" business which we have finished, the
" experience we have acquired, the im-
" provement which we have made, require
" a return of acknowledgment and praise.
" When we receive our daily bread, we
" ought not to forget at whose charge we
" are maintained, and who it is that gives
" us a power to procure it, and to receive
" refreshment and pleasure from it."

But the duty of private prayer will be allowed to comprise motives besides those of praise and thanksgiving, and which will prove it to be highly acceptable to God.

Private prayer is in strict unison with the sincerity of religion; and carries with it a testimony of that belief and trust in those attributes of power, wisdom, and

mercy, which are indivisible from the perfection of the Deity. And it is only from a becoming trust and confidence in the Direction and Providence of God, that we can hope to experience any benefit from those eminently Christian virtues of patience, contentment, and resignation: or that we can promise ourselves any benefit from the religion we profess. Hence it is that Christ assures us, "and "all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in "prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive." (Matt. xxi. 22.) No person can be supposed to pray, that has not a full confidence in the Almighty Power to whom he prays — for this would be nothing better than superstition and folly. Whilst on the other hand, the constant custom of privately addressing ourselves to Him who made us, is most commonly a sure

test of that wisdom so frequently extolled in Scripture, as well as of that faith and dependence which will entitle us to God's present and future blessings.

I have abstained, in a great measure, from the mention of such subjects as may be thought best suited either to public or private prayer. But a heathen writer has furnished us with a short rule to this purpose, which might shame those nominal Christians who seem to think the practice of prayer altogether needless. "Lay "aside," says he, "all vain cares, and "mean groveling desires; and ask no- "thing of God, when you come before "Him, which you cannot ask openly. "And further, so live amongst men, as if "God were always before you — so con- "verse with God, as if all men heard

you."* To this I may add more explicitly — that we have all debts of gratitude sufficient to demand acknowledgment and thanksgiving — we have all sins and frailties enough to excite the voice of supplication for mercy and pardon—we have all, more or less, afflictions, which in many cases can find no relief but from God's immediate goodness, and which cannot be borne or mitigated but by a full and implicit dependence upon God's wisdom and mercy.

These are circumstances, which, with

* Tunc scito te isse omnibus cupiditatibus solutum cum eo perveneris, ut nihil Deum roges, nisi quod rogare possis palàm. Sic vive cum hominibus, tanquam Deus videat: sic loquere cum Deo, tanquam homines audiant. SENECA. EPIST.

the whole blessings of revelation — the sacred promises of God's grace here, and of eternal glory in a life to come; will furnish ample matter for the stated seasons of retirement and holy contemplation.

We cannot suppose that we were designed to live without thought, nor that the extraordinary energies of our mind were to be wholly bestowed on our present fleeting and transitory existence. And though the Scriptures by no means exhort us to despise this world, or the innocent enjoyments of it; they teach us the wisdom of weaning our affections from what we must lose so soon, and of placing them upon objects more calculated to satisfy the immortal spirit within us, and more closely connected with that hope of which

we should feel it the greatest misery to be divested.

In the public worship of God, we have happily forms prescribed with a sublimity, and at the same time with a fervent and comprehensive simplicity, which entitle them to our acceptance and veneration. And to conclude with the words of an eminent divine of our church. "The "public worship of God is without ques- "tion a necessary and important duty; "but forasmuch as we may be sometimes "led to it by motives not the most com- "mendable, by compliance with custom, "by respect for our superiors, by love of "reputation, by interest — private wor- "ship has in some respects the advantage "over it. And that intercourse between "God and the soul, which is quite con-

" cealed from the sight and knowledge of
" others, is often the sincerest and the
" truest act of reverence and faith which
" we pay to Him.

" If we accustom ourselves to this
" secret conversation with God, and pre-
" serve that habitual reverence towards
" Him, and that opinion of his perfections
" and of our own defects which the Gos-
" pel teaches us to entertain, we shall
" never fall into that vain and senseless
" babbling which our Lord ascribes to
" the Gentiles. If the heart be duly dis-
" posed, words will be ready to express
" our sentiments. Eloquence is not re-
" quired of us as necessary to recommend
" our prayers to our Heavenly Father.
" And yet, if it were required, even in this
" we need not be deficient: for the affec-

" tions are always eloquent. If we feel " our wants, our wants will teach us to " pray: and if we are sensible of benefits " received, gratitude will teach us to re- " turn thanks.'

Let us then, as the Apostle St. James advises us, " Draw nigh to God, and He " will draw nigh to us." (ch. iv. 8.) Let us endeavour to " acquaint ourselves now " with Him; if we would hope to be at " peace with Him now, and for ever." (Job, xxii. 21.)

" Now unto Him, who is able to do " exceeding abundantly above all that we " ask or think, according to the power " that worketh in us; unto Him be glory

* Jortin.

" in the church by Christ Jesus, through-
" out all ages, world without end." (Eph.
iii. 20, 21.)

SERMON XIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

MATTHEW, xiii. 31, 32.

" *Another parable put He forth unto*
" *them, saying, The Kingdom of*
" *Heaven is like unto a grain of*
" *mustard-seed, which a man took*
" *and sowed in his field: which*
" *indeed is the least of all seeds;*
" *but when it is grown, it is the*
" *greatest among herbs, and be-*
" *cometh a tree, so that the birds*

" *of the air come and lodge in the*
" *branches thereof.*"

THIS is one of the parables recited by our Saviour, descriptive of the nature and fate of the Gospel, or the Christian religion; which, as I have frequently observed to you, is figuratively called, by way of eminence, the kingdom of heaven.

In the Parable of the Sower is depicted the different effects which the Doctrine of the Gospel would produce, according to the reception it should meet with, and the various dispositions it would have to encounter. Here we are taught, that the Religion of Christ would be productive of happiness to those only,

who, according to the very simple and comprehensive expression, would receive it into "an honest and good heart" — — (Luke, viii. 15.) — that is, who would receive it with a candid, open, unprejudiced mind; and who would be disposed to practice what was pious, and just, and virtuous. For it is to be observed, that prejudice is not honest—it is, in its very nature, unfair and unreasonable. A prejudiced person can never be expected to learn any thing that is estimable, but just as he may like it, and as it may happen to fall in with his own perverted and mistaken ideas. And the wicked, or the evil-inclined are apt to turn away with disgust from a doctrine that opposes and condemns the whole of their conduct. They are represented as "Men who love "Darkness rather than Light, because

" their deeds are evil."—(John, iii. 19.) The parable of the good seed and the tares, represents the mixture of good and bad men that would be found in the world, and the distinction that will be made between them at the day of judgment.

The parable of the net thrown into the sea, and which gathered fish of every description, which were afterwards carefully separated, the good being saved, and the bad thrown away; is altogether to the same purpose.

The parable in the text, alludes to the beginning, the expansion, and the benefits of Christ's religion. It is upon these subjects that I mean to address you at present.

The origin of Christianity is not so much the object which I have in view. That is clearly from God—and is to be traced up from what I should rather call its beginning, or its direct appearance in the world, by the preaching of Christ and his Apostles; to the moment that man forfeited his innocence, and stood in need of reconciliation."*

When Christ was born at Bethlehem in Judea, it was suspected but by a few, that He was the person, who, by the gradual introduction of a new religion, should overthrow the idolatry of pagan

* I venture to make a distinction between origin and beginning. Christianity had its origin in the purpose and will of God before the world was. It began, when it became known.

worship, and supercede the inspired revelation of Judaism. Not supercede it by annihilating it, or rendering it abortive—but rather, and more decidedly, by completing and establishing the testimony borne by Moses, and the Prophets, and by the then existing history of the Jewish nation, to what St. John emphatically calls the "Kingdom of our God, and "the power of his Christ,"—or his anointed. (Rev. xii. 10.) But Herod the King of Judea was among those who were sufficiently acquainted with prophecy as to believe that Christ was the "Ruler in Israel"* foretold in the inspired writings. And it was this apprehension or persuasion that caused the hor-

* Micah. v. 2.

rid massacre of all the Infants at Bethlehem

There was no brilliant display of earthly grandeur accompanying the first appearance of the Saviour, excepting that contained in the emblematical homage of the wise men, who prefigured the offices He should fulfil, of a priest, a ruler, and an expiatory victim, by the gifts which they presented to Him, of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gold being a commonly-received emblem of kingly dominion—the frankincense typifying the duties of the priesthood, and the myrrh representing the usual ceremony observed towards condemned persons.

It was by progressively unfolding, in

his whole life, whatever had been prophetically or typically delivered concerning the Messiah, that Christ proved Himself to be the chosen Messenger of God, and the Saviour of mankind. And thus in his own person, the kingdom of Heaven, or which as I have said is the same thing, the doctrines of the Gospel, may be resembled to the grain of mustard-seed, the least of all seed—but which grows up into a tree sufficiently large to afford shelter to the fowls of the air. It may not be unnecessary to inform you, that this is literally true of the mustard-tree, according to the accounts of historians and travellers who have seen its extraordinary vegetation in the hot and fertile climates of the East.

And so has Christianity, from a small

beginning, dating its beginning as I have chosen to do for the sake of precision, to the first appearance of its Divine Author, expanded itself, as we now behold it, over a great part of the known world. And so, no doubt, will it go on, extending its salutary branches, till, to use an expression of the Psalmist's, "The Earth "shall be literally filled with the good- "ness of the Lord." (Ps. xxxiii. 5.)

Let us go on to another memorable epoch or era in the history of Christianity, than at which the power of God was never more manifestly displayed—and that is, the first preaching of it by the Apostles of Jesus Christ.

If the wisdom of man had been concerned in such an undertaking, it is easy

to believe that they would have pursued very different measures from those adopted by the Son of God. It is natural to imagine that they would have sought out for the most learned, the eloquent, and the powerful — that they would have placed their defence in the refinement and subtilty of argument and persuasion, and would probably, like Mahomet, the manifest impostor, have resorted to the sword, rather than not effect that for which argument and persuasion proved too impotent. In short, it never can be supposed that the wisdom of man would have directed him to fix upon persons of such middling capacities, and talents, and of such mean employments, for teachers and promulgators of a new system of religion, as the first Apostles of Jesus Christ. And yet, by the preaching of these persons, and by

the effect of their arduous labours, the religion of Christ has made its way, and maintained its ground, from the time of their being called, and commissioned to preach it, to the present moment. From the apparent insignificancy of a grain of mustard-seed, it has spread itself out into a wide branching tree, offering shelter to as many as are disposed to seek its comfortable and heavenly protection.

It is rather a curious and incomprehensible notion, which some who would fain pass for philosophers of the present day have ventured to advance, when they have spoken of Christianity as of a doctrine which none but mad men and fools—none but the superstitious and enthusiastic have ever believed. But since such a suggestion has presented itself, I may be

allowed to observe, that in such hasty assertions or opinions, it has either been carelessly overlooked, or purposely disregarded, that it would be as easy to number the sand upon the sea-shore, as to enumerate those of the most elevated and resplendent characters which have ever adorned human nature, who have been convinced of the truth of Christ's religion. It is however no part of my wish or intention to enter into any examination of this kind at present. Nor in truth does the strength and power which are the obvious characteristics of the Christian faith, stand in need of any aid from the assent of those who have embraced it. It is true, that the religion itself is adorned and recommended, and the omnipotent Author of it is glorified, by the correspondent lives of its

professors. But it would be a woeful mistake to suppose, that the same arm which erected the standard was not able to support it. And the decision of Gamaliel, as mentioned in the 5th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, with reference indeed to those very Apostles, will, no doubt, for ever be found applicable to the doctrines of the Gospel. "Refrain from these men, and let them "alone; for if this counsel, or this work "be of men, it will come to nought: But "if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; "lest haply ye be found to fight against "God." (v. 38, 39.)

Leaving these palpable deductions of reason aside for the moment, let us rather turn our attention to the almost imperceptible and silent progress which Christianity

has made, and is now apparently making throughout the world — from a beginning, which, according to the wisdom of man, was as unpromising as possible. Namely, from the preaching and labours of a few poor men, who could no more be thought able to enlarge and to establish such a fabric of divinity and morality as that which composes the Gospel of Christ, than they could have been thought able to have added to the use and beauty of the creation. But thus "it pleased God," as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "by "the foolishness of preaching"—as all apparent human means are weak and foolish when compared with the possibility of God's will and power — or foolishness, as it was even then so esteemed and called by the infatuated and incredulous. "It "pleased God," says the Apostle, "by

" the foolishness, the simplicity — of
" preaching, to save them that believed:
" For the Jews," he proceeds, " require a
" sign; and the Greeks seek after wis-
" dom. But we preach Christ crucified;
" unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and
" unto the Greeks foolishness. But unto
" them who are called, both Jews and
" Greeks, Christ the *power of God*, and
" the *wisdom of God*. Because," what they are pleased to call, " the foolishness
" of God, is wiser than men, and the
" weakness of God is stronger than men.
" But ye see your calling, brethren, how
" that not many wise men after the flesh,
" not many mighty, not many noble are
" called. But God hath chosen the fool-
" ish things of the world to confound the
" wise; and God hath chosen the weak
" things of the world to confound the

" things which are mighty. And base
" things of the world, and things which
" are despised, hath God chosen, yea,
" and things which are not, to bring to
" nought things that are. That no flesh
" should glory in his presence." (1 Cor. i. 21, &c.) And a little after, speaking of his own preaching in the same strain of truth and humility, he adds — " And I,
" brethren, when I came to you, came not
" with excellency of speech, or of wisdom,
" declaring unto you the testimony of
" God. For I determined to know no-
" thing among you, save Jesus Christ,
" and Him crucified. And I was with
" you in weakness, and in fear, and in
" much trembling: and my speech and
" my preaching was not with enticing
" words of man's wisdom; but in demon-
" stration of the *Spirit*, and of *Power*.

"That your faith should not stand in the "*wisdom of men*, but in the power of God." (ch. ii. 1, &c.) In which last words we may gather the whole of the reasoning. Since nothing can more clearly evince the wisdom, and power, and mercy of God, in the doctrines of sanctification and redemption, than the very means by which those doctrines have been made known to the world. And it is no less pleasing than wonderful, humbly and dispassionately to trace the progress of the Christian religion from a beginning so contrary to the wisdom of man, and so far above it; and yet by no means subversive of his reasoning faculties. Groundless indeed would be our faith — shaken indeed would be our hope, if they could be proved to stand only in the wisdom and power of men!

The wisdom of man, on the contrary, has found it not only difficult, but impossible to account for the rise and growth of Christianity, otherwise than by allowing it to be of divine origin. We have heard indeed of a few infidels — we have heard of their scoffs — their attempts at wit — their malevolent insinuations — and their bold and presumptuous denial of its truth. But we have never heard of any thing like the solidity of argument from among them. Particular expressions in the sacred writings have been criticised — particular relations have been canvassed — and particular modes of worship have been called in question, and have had their particular opponents. But we have never seen the shadow of an attempt to refute the sublime and holy doctrines of the Gospel that has peserved our notice, or that has fulfilled

any other purpose, than that of throwing the character and reputation of those, who have shown the weakness and temerity of making any such attempt, into disrepute and oblivion. Well and truly may we ask, with the Apostle, "Where is the "wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is "the Disputer of this world? Hath not "God made foolish the wisdom of this "world?" (1 Cor. i. 20.) The utmost efforts of incredulity — the deepest researches of philosophy, have never been able to overcome the testimony borne by the Evangelist St. Mark to the first Apostles, in the following words: "and they "went forth, and preached every where; "*the Lord working with them*, and con- "firming the word with signs following." (ch. xvi. 20.) And thus, from the small seed sown in the hearts of these apparently

incapable and insignificant teachers, we behold the fair far-spreading tree of Christ's Gospel flourishing around us.

The same metaphor, or figure of speech, used in the parable on which we are particularly discoursing, may be applied to the simplicity observable in the constitution, and in the system of worship of Christ's religion, compared with other religions of any notoriety. In the Mosaic dispensation, the offerings and oblations, the sacrifices, the atonements and purifications, and consequently the various offices of service attached to the holy temple; as well as the grandeur and magnificence of the ornaments and the necessary implements of the temple itself, were innumerable; and fill the mind with admiration. Though we are not to forget, that

the necessity of these must be acknowledged, when we consider in how great a degree they were not only temporary, but almost all of them symbolical or typical of that perfect law of righteousness contained in the Gospel, which was to remain unchangeable and to last for ever. The rites and ceremonies of Pagan worship were equally numerous, if not more so, without having the same use — and without any great degree of reasonableness; excepting that of acknowledging a universal predisposing cause of all things.

In the Christian dispensation the contrast is striking. We there find nothing splendid, or gaudy, or fascinating in the exterior — Christ instituted but two rites or ceremonies, Baptism, and the Eucharist or Lord's Supper — sufficient to mark the

intent of the Almighty, and to secure the attention and attachment of mankind — and placed the foundation of his religion upon the truth of his own character, and upon the sublimity, perfection, and usefulness of the doctrine He taught. A doctrine as far above the imagination of man, or the possibility of man to conceive, as the heavens are above the earth. A doctrine so worthy, if we may be allowed the expression — so worthy of the Deity — so illustrative of his wisdom and mercy — so conformable to that reason with which He has endued mankind — so congenial with all that human nature can require — and so calculated to produce universal happiness.

The religion of Moses was clearly local. Confined to one people, and to one tem-

ple, whither as many of the worshippers as were deemed able, were to resort by prescription three times a year.* But throughout this holy dispensation, we perceive the germ or root of that divine system of worship which was to be universal — which was to be addressed to all people, nations, and languages, and of which the temple was to be in the heart of all true believers.

Where then are we to look for those means of a becoming communication with God for which every rational Being is instinctively disposed to seek? Upon what principle shall we lay open our hearts before Him, and implore that mercy, which our reason will teach us must be

* Ex. xxiii. 17. Deut. xvi. 16.

equivalent with justice? Where shall we turn for instruction upon these essential points of knowledge, but to that Holy Spirit of God which illumines every page of the Gospel? Which proves it to be the fulfilment, the completion of a former revelation, and magnifies its superiority above every other persuasion that the intelligent mind of man can possibly suggest. It was this benign and invisible spirit, infused, like the grain of mustard seed, into the "honest and good hearts" of the Apostles, which enabled them to display the merciful determinations of the Almighty to the whole Gentile world — to unfold, what the Apostle calls, "the "riches of his grace" * to all nations — to extend the arms of his Providence to all

* Eph. i. 7.

mankind. As freely thus to open the kingdom of Heaven, unlimited, without restriction, without "respect of persons" as a tree offers its branches for an habitation or for a resting-place to the fowls of Heaven.

To the same spiritual influence too must we ascribe every instance of piety and virtue which can enrich or satisfy the human mind. For that there is a satisfaction, as well as a beauty, in every act of piety and virtue, arising from a sense of duty, as well as from the hope of its being recommendatory to God's favour, I trust will not be denied. And to the giver of every good and perfect gift are we beholden, for whatever share of religious zeal and of integrity we may possess. They who look up for God's eternal favour

to repentance, or to any other motive of devout confidence, though the pride and weakness of human nature may even tempt them for a time to deny, or at least prevent them from acknowledging the guidance of his Holy Spirit, may nevertheless rest assured that the seed of the kingdom is already sown in their hearts, and may indulge an humble hope that in good time He who sowed it there will bring it to maturity. Trust in God, upon any occasion, is a happy omen of that faith, which it may be expected will lead us to give up every notion of our own sufficiency, and to embrace a full confidence in those promises of mercy, which are propounded to us in the Gospel. And as Christ told a Scribe who came to Him for instruction, They are not far from the

Kingdom of God, * who feel the necessity of recommending themselves to his mercy, by any act of religious obedience.

It is from principles of this nature, that the truth and efficacy of Christ's religion continue to show themselves in the virtues of patience, and temperance, and hope, and resignation, in the happy lives, and in the still happier moments of death, of those who place their dependence upon God's mercy through Christ. Thus experience has made up, for the absence of those more evident tokens of God's power in the miraculous gifts which accompanied the first propagation of the Gospel. At the time of Christ's ascension, we are informed that the number of the disciples

* Mark xii. 34.

"was about a hundred and twenty,' (Acts, i. 15.) who were then present. Quickly after, at the first discourse delivered by St. Peter, "three thousand were "added to them." (ch. ii. 41.) While we admit the fact, we must also allow with St. Paul, that the *sufficiency* was not in the preacher, but of God. "Who," as he adds, "made the Apostles able ministers "of the New Testament, and manifested "the glorious ministration of the Spirit." (2 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 8.) Within less than a century, the Gospel was received in many and distant nations. And though we are not now to look for such direct indications of God's assistance, ample conviction is to be derived from the Scriptures themselves, and from the example of those who through succeeding ages have accepted the doctrines of the Scriptures as a rule

for their faith and practice. God grant that we may be in the number of these. That "having heard the word, we may "keep it, and bring forth fruit with pa-"tience." (Luke, viii. 15.) Not doubting, to use the language of the inspired Isaiah, that "as the earth bringeth forth her bud, "and as the garden causeth the things "that are sown in it to spring forth; so "the Lord God will cause righteousness "and praise to spring forth before all the "nations." (ch. lxi. 11.) And to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who alone is able to give the increase, be all glory, might, majesty, and dominion, for ever and ever.

SERMON XIV.

THE BLESSING OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

ROMANS, xiv. 22.

" *Happy is he that condemneth not*
" *himself in that thing which he*
" *alloweth.*"

IN this part of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, an allusion seems to have been made to some questions or notions of a superstitious nature, which had already begun to tarnish the purity of Christ's religion.

Nothing can be more grand, nor, at the same time, more simple, than those precepts, and that example, which the Lord Jesus left his Disciples. And yet, from various causes, men have ever been inclined to form conceptions, which, though not in themselves sinful, have been prejudicial to the truth; and for which they have had no warrant in Scripture. And from the prejudice naturally entertained in favour of our own opinions—for the pride of human nature is too apt to lead us to believe that we are all right, however we may differ one with another—we have beheld the growth of those dissensions in the church—that is, in religion, as well as in the public conduct of life—which have been not only irreconcilable with the profession we have assumed, but also highly disgraceful to it. It is as won-

derful, to a reflecting mind, to perceive the small foundation upon which many of those dissensions have been built; as well as the opposition and rancorous animosity with which they have been maintained.

Some, observing the mistakes that have been produced by the easy credulity and enthusiastic warmth of temper in others, have almost persuaded themselves to believe nothing. And for fear of becoming the dupes of that "Zeal without knowledge," so justly reprehended by St. Paul in the 10th chapter of this same Epistle, have fallen into the opposite extremes of lukewarmness and indifference.

But reason and conscience will teach us

that concerning the care of the soul, and a future state of existence, no dictates of human wisdom merely can be available, and that there is nothing that can be thought of as a matter of indifference, or that does not deserve the most constant and serious consideration.

And it is not always upon what we believe or do ourselves, that our consideration is to be wholly employed; but upon the effect which our faith and practice may have upon others—especially upon our children, and upon our dependents, and upon the circle of society around us.

But let us hear what St. Paul has remarked and advised upon this interesting subject.

" Him that is weak in the faith receive " ye, but not to doubtful disputations"—not to arguments of strife and contention. " For one believeth that he may eat all " things: another who is weak"—wavering, unsettled—perhaps uninformed—" eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth, " despise him that eateth not; and let not " him that eateth not, judge him that " eateth: for God hath received him. " Who art thou that judgest another " man's servant? To his own master " he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall " be holden up; for God is able to make " him stand. One man esteemeth one " day above another; another esteemeth " every day alike." To which is subjoined an emphatic observation, that well deserves to be remembered—and much of the same nature with the sentiment

expressed in the text. "Let every man," says the Apostle, "*be fully persuaded in his own mind.*" Let him not determine upon any thing rashly—Let him not take up any opinion, or pursue any line of conduct, without every necessary and possible enquiry, or without due consideration — and then — let him yield to the force of his conviction, without censuring or condemning others.

We must recollect, that by the mention of the choice of meats, or the observance of particular days, the Apostle alludes to a distinction respectively made in these matters by Jews and Gentiles. In the ceremonial law of the Jews, we find that some kinds of food were allowed, and others prohibited. As some animals were deemed fit for sacrifices and

oblations, and others rejected as unfit. All which regulations were no doubt calculated, by that divine wisdom which directed the whole, especially with regard to the Jews, to meet the circumstances of this peculiar people—no less than to fulfil the designs of Providence; which might be perceived, though the means might not at all times be fully comprehended.

The Gentile nations were notorious for their attention to particular days, and particular seasons, in the concerns of Religion, and in the more public concerns of life. And both Jews and Gentiles, when they first became converts to Christianity, might naturally be supposed loath to give up old established customs in which they had been bred; and found it

difficult to depart at once from those rules and ordinances that had been attached to their former persuasions. But when the light of Revelation burst forth, and the Kingdom of God was more fully displayed by the promulgation of the Gospel; many of these prescriptive duties lost their value. And Christ, who came to dispense universal Blessings, inculcated by precepts and example, the doctrine of purifying the heart and affections, as a duty far above the pertinacious adherence to local and temporary observances; which had fulfilled their purpose, as far as they might have been types and emblems of a purer and more rational worship.

Hence St. Paul argues, that "The "kingdom of God is not meat and drink;

"but righteousness, and peace, and joy
"in the Holy Ghost. For he that in
"these things serveth Christ, is accept-
"able to God, and approved of men.
"Let us therefore follow after the things
"which make for peace; and things
"wherewith one may edify another."
(v. 17, 18, 19.)

The exterior observances and ordinances of religion, which are clearly and expressly taught and commanded by the word of God—Such as the observation of the Sabbath, public and private worship, with the two holy rites of baptism and the Lord's supper, are absolutely necessary to complete the character of Christ's Disciples; that is, if we would follow his commandments and example. But the principal motive of these, rightly consi-

dered, is the exciting an affectionate zeal in the service of God, and the disposing the mind to a love of virtue. And where the heart is not warmly engaged in the performance of them, they can be entitled to little or no commendation.

The adoption of any religious persuasion itself, is so far a matter of choice, though not of indifference, as that all men are at liberty to follow the dictates of their own consciences. But let them "not use their liberty as a cloak for "maliciousness," or as it may be translated, "of wickedness."—(1 Pet. ii. 16.) Let them take care that their consciences are pure and unperverted; so that whatever notions they may adopt, may not become obstacles to their own hopes of salvation, and shall have no tendency to

disturb or to diminish the peace and happiness of their fellow creatures. Let them so far be guided by the Apostle's advice, as not only to abstain from judging others, but to beware " that no man," as he says, " put a stumbling-block, or an occasion " to fall in his brother's way." (v. 13.)— It is not always that a dissent from general practice, or that a plausible attachment to the prejudices of education, or that a partiality for rules of no intrinsic value, is attended with this circumspection. Which however is no mean quality in the due exercise of that sense and reason, which more or less are imparted to all men. In these respects, the words of the text are worthy of observation, and " Happy indeed is he that condemneth " not himself in that thing which he " alloweth."

The general conduct of mankind opens a much wider field for the application of this accurate and well-grounded determination. Since it is not uncommon to see persons acting not altogether without thought, but in direct contradiction to their own sentiments, and in defiance of their own powers of discrimination.

In concerns of the highest moment, where the interests of religion are deeply involved, and the welfare of the soul is absolutely endangered, what is called the usage or custom of the world is often seen to lay conscience asleep. And honour, and probity, and fair-dealing, are sacrificed at the shrine of momentary gratification, and of even inconsiderable profit.

In matters of apparently more trifling

consideration, the claims of fashion reconcile many propensities and indulgences, of which but a short reflection would show us the imprudence and inconvenience.

Every kind and every degree of excess and intemperance, an injudicious, not to say a criminal, expenditure of private property, for the sake of vying with others, between whom and ourselves there can be no justifiable comparison; the waste of time, of hours, and days, and years, in frivolous pursuits, that offer no possibility of mental improvement, or of temporal advantage, but on the contrary, have a fatal tendency to obstruct both — these are among the great variety of circumstances, that are to be taken into the calculation of those errors, to which we

are perhaps all of us more or less guilty of allowing full licence, in spite of our own condemning judgment.

It is probable that the error and the danger may be overlooked by a false appreciation. By giving to some things more weight than they deserve, and by treating others with indifference which are of the greatest consequence. Thus our Lord reprehends what He calls the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, who would not eat with unwashen hands whilst they made the cleansing of the heart a secondary consideration. And who were scrupulous in the payment of certain tythes, whilst they omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. (Matt. xv. 19, 20.—xxiii. 23.)

Thus in the chapter before us, St. Paul speaks of dissensions that had arisen in those early days, concerning the choice of certain meats, and the regard that was paid to particular days, whilst the great purport of Christ's coming was forgotten. And thus, almost from that time to the present, a dispute has been maintained by some Christians, upon the supposed superior excellence of extempore Prayers and Preaching — as if nothing besides could be pertinent or efficacious.—Whilst others have not only given a preference to the solidity of digested forms; but have treated their opponents with contempt.

But is true, undissembled, genuine piety — is the love of God and of man, the foundation of such differences in

opinion? If so, contempt, and disrespect, and censure, and malevolence, and abuse, will have no share in the arguments on either side. And we shall use our utmost endeavours, as becomes the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, to prevent "our good from being evil-spoken of." (v. 16.)

If, as to what immediately belongs to the obligations of Religion, whether of a ceremonial or a moral nature, we could be induced to promote as nearly as can be, a uniformity of practice; and to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the Bond "of Peace" (Eph. iv. 3.)—If we would wish to shew forth the fruits of "Righ-"teousness, and Peace, and Joy in the "Holy Ghost," in which, as the Apostle

observes, the Kingdom of God, or in other words, the essence of the Gospel of Christ consists, the suggestion of a few plain rules may possibly help us to so desirable an end.

In the first place, whatever the word of God commands, the duty of explicit obedience to that can make no question.

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy "God, and Him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. iv. 10.)

"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the "Father, and of the Son, and of the "Holy Ghost." (xxviii. 29.)

" This do in remembrance of me" (Luke, xxii. 19.)

" And Thou shalt love thy neighbour " as thyself." (Matt. xix. 19.)

There can be little room for altercation, or to prevaricate, in such plain directions as these. But it is from the pride of human nature, and the blind attempts to alter, and to new model the work of God —to bring it down to our own capacities, and to make it suit our own vicious inclinations, that so many departures from it are to be seen.

2dly. In whatever respects the more common concerns of life, we should do well to consider the true nature of that distinction which may be made, between

those things that are deemed necessary, and those which are thought to be indifferent. Though if we constantly kept in mind the affinity that exists between the invisible Creator and ourselves, you will perhaps agree with what I have already observed, that there are few things that can be looked upon as indifferent. Our daily habits, and our daily conversation, are of no small consequence, either to ourselves or to others. Much good may be diffused, and much mischief prevented, if a proper degree of reflection were suffered to direct us in this our most unavoidable intercourse with the world.

3dly. In the next place, our pastimes and amusements are not always objects of such indifference as not to require some share of discretion both in the

choice and the indulgence of them. There are some who, with fantastical austerity oppose every kind of relaxation as sin.—Whilst others under the mask of harmless entertainment, lose sight of every principle of decency and decorum. The extremes on either side are unreasonable—on one unpardonable. For as the prescriptive duties of religion will allow of no reservation, so whatever is of an immoral tendency, or actually criminal, ought as resolutely to be avoided. We talk of *harmless* recreations and *innocent* pleasures. Let us be careful that the hours which are given up to recreation and pleasure, are employed only upon objects *that are innocent and harmless.* We should also do well to recollect, that there are many things which have no bad effect upon those of mature judgment and de-

cision; but which may act as strong temptations to others of less reflection and experience.

Indeed there are few pursuits or habits of our life, that are of so trifling and indifferent a nature, as to be wholly unmixed with good or evil, either to ourselves or to others. And both good and evil are to be promoted, by the countenance and example of individuals.

But the principal lesson I would deduce from the words of the text, is this —That we all of us endeavour to do what is right, and that we maintain our own opinions without judging or condemning the rest of mankind, or those who differ from us. Except in those things as I have said, which are actually

and manifestly criminal. And even here, and upon all occasions, we may defend our own principles without offensiveness — we may exhort with humility — we may reprove without harshness — we may argue without malevolence. — And from the Gospel of Christ we may learn to pity and to forgive; and to bear with the infirmities of each other. For, "Who "art thou," as says the Apostle, "that "judgest another man's servant? To his "own master he standeth or falleth. "Yea, he shall be holden up; for God "is able to make him stand." (v. 41.)

We know not the motives, nor the strength, nor the weakness of others. "But why," he proceeds, "dost thou "judge thy brother? Or why dost thou "set at nought thy brother? For we shall

" *all* stand before the judgment-seat of " Christ." (v. 10.) This is bringing the lesson home to each of us individually, and leads me to the conclusion of what I have to offer at present respecting each of us.

There is nothing more lamentable, nor more carefully to be avoided, than what is commonly called sinning against conviction. That is the living in error and disobedience with regard to that service which we owe to God — and the persevering in evil practices which our own consciences would condemn, if conscience were allowed to dictate to us. The former may arise from the want of information which some people are too lazy to seek and to obtain. The latter is more clearly owing to that unhappy and rigid

dominion which general fashion or custom is suffered to have over us, aided by the blind and fatal persuasion of our own depraved inclinations. In the former case, that is with regard to the service which we owe to God, we have the Scriptures to direct us. We know their sublimity, their reasonableness, and their perfection. We may be assured, as far as the understanding of man can be assured, of their truth and authenticity. And there, said Christ, "Ask, and it "shall be given unto you; seek, and "ye shall find; knock, and it shall be "opened unto you." (Matt. vii. 7.) In the latter case, that of persevering in practices which we know to be wrong, nothing seems to be wanting but reflection and resolution. The excuses that are made, and the arguments that are used

on either of these occasions are seldom of any weight. Because the pretence of being convicted upon any subject, without being able to say why, can be nothing but a pretence; for where information is rejected or unattainable, conviction must be totally out of the case. And to fly in the face of Heaven, for want of thought, or because others are negligent of their salvation, is an excuse which I trust will not be admitted by any one now present.

From these few and short reflections it may be inferred, that doubt will stand us in but little stead. And upon this subject, St. Paul has given us an admirable rule, in what he has said respecting those dissentions upon which he was immeditately treating, and to which I have

endeavoured to give a wider application. "I know," says he, "and am persuaded "by the Lord Jesus, that there is no-"thing unclean in itself; but to him "that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, "to *him* it is unclean." (v. 14.) It behoves us then in all respects, and upon all occasions to be sure, as far as we have the power of being so, that we are right. I could remind you, if time allowed me, of the alarming moment of conviction, which most probably will come, whether we seek it or no—I could shew you the arduousness of repentance, and the painfulness of remorse, when all our hopes of future happiness shall be depending upon that mercy of God, which, till that inevitable hour of doubt and terror, we may have despised and neglected. Let us now then, while we are blessed with

time and opportunity, consult the motives by which our general conduct is influenced. "Let us now, I repeat, follow "after the things that make for peace, "and things whereby one may edify "another. And happy is he that con- "demneth not himself in that thing "which he alloweth."

And now unto Him "Who hath saved "us, and called us with a holy calling, "not according to our works, but ac- "cording to his own purpose and grace, "which was given us in Christ Jesus "before the world began." To Him be all glory, and praise, and thanksgiving, for ever and ever.

SERMON XV.

THE BLESSINGS AND PRIVILEGES OF CHRISTIANITY.

ROMANS, viii. 16, 17, 18.

" *The Spirit itself beareth witness with*
" *our Spirit, that we are the Chil-*
" *dren of God. And if Children,*
" *then Heirs: Heirs of God, and*
" *Joint-Heirs with Christ: if so be*
" *that we suffer with Him, that we*
" *may be also glorified together.*
" *For I reckon that the sufferings*
" *of this present time, are not wor-*

" *thy to be compared with the Glory*
" *that shall be revealed in us.*"

You may remember, that in a late discourse, I endeavoured to show you the necessity of our making use of whatever share of understanding we may possess, in the choice of our religious principles, of our modes of worship, and of our general conduct through life: so that our decision may, as much as is possible, be made reconcilable with the dictates of Reason and Conscience.

I now purpose to remind you of the peculiar Blessings and Privileges of that Religion which has been taught us by Jesus Christ. And it is certain, that the exercise of those intellectual faculties

which God has given us, can never be better, more wisely, more advantageously, employed, than upon subjects of so important a nature. What can be so interesting as the prospect of Immortality? What so desirable as the well-grounded hope of a happy and glorious immortality? It is a subject by no means beyond the capacity of those in the early stages of life. — If anything can increase its importance, it is the approach that we are all making towards it: that is, towards the alternative of a blessed state of existence hereafter, or the sensible privation of it The very mention of God's eternal favour might be thought a sufficient motive to seek it — the possibility of incurring his eternal anger, without presuming to describe its effects, is sufficiently alarming.

Let us for the present, turn our views to those promises that are made in the Gospel of Christ to the penitent and humble Believer. I say, penitent, because we are all sinners—so far as that we have all departed from the fulfilment of that duty which we owe to God as rational creatures, as that we never can think of deserving salvation upon the strength of our own merits. And I say Believer, because the acknowledgement of our own imperfection, and insufficiency, is clearly an act of faith—And of that faith which will be required of us.

It may be said that Reason teaches us to believe the necessity of Repentance. Well, be it so—and then it follows, that Reason acts in conformity with God's holy word, and teaches us to believe what

no human being can deny. I might pursue this line of argument further, and say, How did we come by our Reason, if God did not endue us with it? So that in this case, God and reason are the same thing.* And hence the Apostle observes, in the words of the text "that the Spirit itself "beareth witness with our Spirit," the power and guidance of God over that spiritual intelligent mind which He has given us, and acting with it, enables us to feel "that we are the children of God." This is coming at once to my intention. For we may all indeed be called the children of God, as having been created by Him. But this affinity is forfeited by death, as the penalty of sin—the dread of which is

* Ratio autem nihil aliud est, quam in corpus humanum pars divini spiritus mersa. — SEN.

that "bondage to fear," as St. Paul writes in the verse immediately preceeding the text, which was the curse of the old law, under which all the descendants of Adam lived, till life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel. "For ye "have not," says the Apostle, "received "the spirit of bondage again to fear; but "ye have received the spirit of adoption, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father." And therefore to believe that we are the children of God by adoption and grace, is among the greatest of those privilege of Christianity which I would wish to impress upon your minds.

Perhaps it may be owing to the want of a sufficient acquaintance with those doctrines which the word of God has revealed to us — or the not suffering our reflection

to dwell sufficiently upon the interest which we all have in those doctrines, that a greater warmth and attachment to the service of God, and to a life of religious obedience, is not more generally perceived. Observe, I am censuring none in particular—I am adverting to the world at large — and when I speak of a religious life, I mean a life that in its various concerns shall be directed by the love of God, and by a dependence upon his holy will

And do not the words which I have laid before you, contain a doctrine that is worthy of the deepest consideration? Is the possibility of being ranked among "the heirs of God, and joint-heirs with "Christ," a matter of indifference, or of no importance? Say that the expressions are figurative — do they not allude to that

eternal happiness in the Kingdom of God and of Christ, to which every rational mind would aspire? Do we not all hope to exchange this life for a better? And are not the most incredulous willing to allow that God designed us to be happy? Surely they are not all so blind or so unphilosophical—for incredulity is mistaken philosophy — are all the incredulous therefore so unphilosophical, as to acknowledge the extent of God's mercy and goodness at the expense of his justice? And great and wonderful as the powers of man are, what means have we in our power of *satisfying the justice* of God? That justice, which we may well believe will call us to account for the use we have made of the vast superiority of understanding and intellect which He has entrusted to us. Or, that justice, which, to descend to the

lowest degree of human capacity, will require an account for the neglect or perversion of that power imparted to us all, of distinguishing between right and wrong.

Considering that the attributes of God are all equal; that is, considering that the power, the wisdom, the justice, and the mercy of the Almighty are equally perfect and unchangeable — that He has shown in his holy word, and in the whole economy of human life, his determination to punish sin, and that it shall only be pardoned by sincere repentance, and by expiation — we may surely rest satisfied with those means which God Himself has provided for the execution of his own designs. We may as well talk of giving vigour to the Sun, or of diminishing the

force of his rays, as to dream of altering or improving the Counsels of the most High. And where shall we find any thing to trust to, above the evidence which the Gospel affords us of its truth? There the justice and mercy of God are equally resplendent. And it becomes us his creatures, to bow with submission; and to accept the proffered Blessings of grace and redemption, with humility and thankfulness. We are placed in a high rank as men — We are higher still as Christians — to whom the priviledge is granted of becoming "Heirs of God, and joint-heirs "with Christ. If so be that we suffer "with Him, that we may be also glorified "together."

St. Paul, in the 2d chap. of his epistle to the Hebrews, speaks of Christ Himself

as being made "perfect through suffer-
"ings." (v. 10.) And our suffering with Christ is frequently and variously mentioned throughout the writings of the Apostles. Such as the being, "crucified "with Christ." (Gal. ii. 20.) And the being "dead with Christ." (Rom. vi. 2, &c.) All which expressions, it is to be noticed, are in a great measure figurative. But the Scripture itself explains what they mean. And we may easily perceive that to be crucified with Christ, is to have such dependence upon the truth of his word, as to crucify, or to conquer, our evil and corrupt affections, for the sake of that glory which He has set before us. To be crucified with Christ, is to encourage the Christian virtues and duties of patience, humility, contentment, and resignation,—to "take up the

" cross and follow Him; that our joy " with Him may be full, and that we may " sit down with Him in the kingdom of " his Father." We may learn that to be dead with Christ is to be dead unto Sin—dead to the destructive and perverse suggestions of our own deceitful hearts, and to the incitements of our own depraved appetites and passions; and alive to the purity, the validity, and the practice of that doctrine which He has taught us. It is " To put off the old man which is " corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts. " And to be renewed in the spirit of our " mind, and to put on the new man, " which after God is created in right- " eousness and true holiness.." (Eph. iv. 22, &c. Col. iii. 9, 10.)

To suffer with Christ generally, means

the necessity of our passing through the various trials and vicissitudes of life which He is represented to have experienced, with the same patience, and resignation, and prompt obedience to the will of God that He manifested upon all occasions. And even submitting to the visitation of death with the same calmness and trust in God, with which He embraced it. Endeavouring thus in all things, to fulfil the purport of our calling, by imitating, as far as the weakness of human nature will admit, the perfections of this "Captain "of our Salvation;" who, as the Apostle St. Peter observes, "suffered for us, lea- "ving us an example that we should fol- "low his steps." (1 Pet. ii. 21.) And when we weigh the insignificance of any, or of all earthly and temporal considerations, against that eternal happiness which

God has promised us through the sufferings of Christ, we shall confess that nothing which we *can* endure, can be accounted too grievous a burden. "For I "reckon," adds the Apostle, "that the "sufferings, of this present life, are not to "be compared with the glory that shall "be revealed in us."

We are not however to entertain such unbecoming notions of the Omnipotent and All-Merciful Creator, as to look upon this present life as a state of punishment. That cannot be meant when we say it is a state of trial. Especially when we consider how true it is, that by far the greater part of its evils, and of our sufferings, are the effects of our own wickedness and indiscretion. When as the thief

acknowledged upon the cross, the great difference between our sufferings and those of the immaculate Jesus is, "that "we indeed suffer justly, for we do but "receive the due reward of our deeds; "but this man," said he, "hath done "nothing amiss." (Luke, xxiii. 41)

The evils we bring upon ourselves may surely be borne without murmuring or discontent. And even in this case we are taught that by the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, our very sins and errors may redound to our advantage, if we can be persuaded to own the justice of their consequences, and strive to correct them for the future. And since there is scarcely a departure from holiness or virtue that has not its punishment annexed; if we accept the rod with patience, and with devout sub-

mission, there may be a hope that its infliction may be a part of that *recompense* which it is said the wicked and the sinner shall receive upon earth: (Prov. xi. 31.) and which may serve to mitigate the divine wrath. And that though "Heaviness may endure for a night, the "morning of a new life may burst forth "upon us with the fulness of Joy." (Ps. xxx. 5.)

On the other hand, there are many evils and vexations of life from which no human being is exempt; and to which the good and the wicked are alike subject—the concomitants of our nature and condition. It is here that the sincerity of religion is shown—it is here that the stedfastness of our faith is put to the trial, and that the triumphant hopes of an

everlasting crown of glory, are undeniably substantiated. " If," says the Apostle, " when ye do well and suffer, ye take " it patiently; this is acceptable with " God." (1 Pet. ii. 20.)

In all respects we are invited and enabled by the religion which we profess, to look up to God as our Father. And " Behold," says St. John, " what man- " ner of love the Father hath bestowed " upon us, that we should be called the " sons of God." (1 John, iii. 1.) And as if to engage our affection and duty by a further display of gracious condescension, " ye are my friends," said our Lord, " if ye do whatsoever I command " you. Henceforth I call you not servants; " for the servant knoweth not what his " Lord doeth; but I have called you

" friends, for all things that I have heard
" of my Father, I have made known
" unto you." (John, xv. 14, 15.)

If then we would raise our ideas of human nature to the level of its capacity, let it not be upon the principles of that vain philosophy, which, with a very mistaken notion of humility, puts the almighty and beneficent ruler of the world at a distance from us—proudly, *not humbly*, ascribing whatever good we do or expect, to the decision of our own power; but let it rather be by the contemplation of that surrounding Providence, which has furnished the mind of man with all its intellectual qualities, for the purpose of holding and enjoying a constant communion with God; to which we are taught to believe that the lower orders of animal

life cannot attain. Let it be in the remembrance of that likeness to God in which we are told we are made; and of that spiritual connection between ourselves and our Almighty Parent, and Redeemer, which the Gospel of Christ has enabled us to indulge.

Let us also recollect, that our claim to an inheritance among the saints of light, or the inhabitants of the kingdom of heaven, is not to be postponed till the hour of our dissolution. If God is our Father, and we are his children, the connection commences from the moment of our birth; and is to be maintained through life, by the grateful acknowledgment of that care which He has abundantly shown towards us, as well as by the conscientious and faithful discharge of those duties,

which will become us as affectionate and obedient children. We shall thus consider Him as the source of all the happiness which this world is capable of affording. We shall see the wisdom and the mercy of all his dispensations. We shall discover the necessity and the prudence of suffering ourselves to be guided by that wisdom, and of placing implicit confidence in that mercy which are so indubitably conspicuous through all the dispositions and concernments of life. We shall learn to bear prosperity without presumption, and to meet adversity, in whatever shape it may assail us, without impatience. We shall taste the pleasures of society with innocent freedom, and we shall retire to the reflections of solitude with unspeakable consolation. The day will shine out upon us with the gracious

renewal of invitation to the rich banquet of nature—and the night will call upon us to close our eyes, prepared, if such be the will of God, to open them in a blissful futurity. Secure in the assurance of the holy spirit, that we are the "Heirs of "God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

Such is the superiority and excellence, such the truth and efficacy of our holy religion. If we deny it the power of conferring these blessings and advantages—if we refuse to accept them, and venture to stifle or to reject their influence,—our religion will become but a dead letter to us. "If our Gospel be hid," says St. Paul, "it is hid to them that are lost. "In whom the God of *this* world hath "blinded the minds of them that believe "not; lest the light of the glorious Gos-

" pel of Christ, who is the image of " God, should shine upon them." (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.)

" But," as the same Apostle writes to the Christians at Ephesus—and as I would fain hope may be applicable to most, if not to all of us that are here present, " Ye have not so learned Christ, if so be " that ye have heard him, and have been " taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus." (Eph. iv. 20.)

Let us then uphold the dignity of our nature as men, which enables us to know God, and to contemplate his perfections. And let us also pay due regard to the sublimity of our profession as Christians, which lifts the mind, the spiritual part of man, above the material, and therefore

perishable, objects of our present transitory state of existence; and leads it to objects more congenial with its own nature, and more capable of satisfying its immortal prospects.

Our connection with this world is indeed of the highest importance, as far as it has a reference to our passage through it—but it is trivial when compared with the relation which we bear to the Father of spirits.

It is the purport of Christ's religion to make us sensible of this union now. And to teach us that our happiness both here and hereafter is certainly to be derived from it. And if the obligations of christianity will enable us to live with comfort, and to die with hope; without

cutting us off from the enjoyment of the numerous rational blessings which the great Creator has strewed in our way; it must be confessed, as our Lord said, that "His yoke is easy, and his burden light." "What reward then shall we "give," may we ask with the Psalmist—or what return "shall we make unto the "Lord, for all the benefits that He "hath bestowed upon us? Let us re- "ceive the cup of salvation, and call "upon the name of the Lord—Let us "pay our vows now in the presence of "all his People—in the courts of the "Lord's house." (Ps. cxvi. 11, &c.)

We are now exhorted to commemorate the death of Him whom God appointed to be the final propitiatory sacrifice for sin. Who gave repeated and ample proofs of

his being the long-expected and predicted Messiah, and of his power to effect our redemption. By whose spirit we are sanctified, and by whose sufferings we are liberated from the bondage of sin, and from the dominion of the grave.

"This do in remembrance of me," was almost the last injunction which the Holy Redeemer left with his Disciples. And I can see no ambiguity, nothing mysterious, nothing superstitious, in so plain, but positive a requisition.

If we put off the use of this part of our worship till the moment of fear and doubt, and resort to it then as a probable passport to Heaven, I allow that it may bear the semblance of superstition, and that the motives to it may be equivocal—

at least as far as we dare venture to judge. But if we conform to it now, as the badge of our faith, as an acknowledgment of our own unworthiness and insufficiency, as a token of our trust in God's mercy through Christ, and of our sincere desire that our lives may henceforward be under the guidance of God's holy spirit—I humbly trust that it will be accepted at the throne of grace, as an act of obedience which will entitle us to the character and to the inheritance of "Heirs of God, "and joint-heirs with Christ." And that thus having glorified our redeemer upon earth, "we may be glorified together, with "Him," in the kingdom of our Father.

I have thought the observance of the present solemnity a fit opportunity of

offering these blessings and privileges of the Gospel to your consideration.

And "May the God of all grace, who "worketh in us both to will and to do "of his good pleasure; and who hath "called us unto his eternal glory by "Christ Jesus, after that we have suf-"fered a while, make us perfect, esta-"blish, strengthen, settle us. To Him "be glory and dominion for ever and "ever."

SERMON XVI.

ON RELIGIOUS WISDOM, WITH THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL.

JAMES, i. 5.

"*If any of you lack wisdom, let him*
"*ask of God, who giveth to all men*
"*liberally, and upbraideth not:*
"*and it shall be given him. But*
"*let him ask in faith, nothing wa-*
"*vering.*"

IT is a very common observation, that happiness is the chief pursuit of mankind.

If it were asked what is meant by happiness, I think we might answer, that according to the most commonly received notions of happiness — such notions as come within the understanding of men in general — it may be said to consist of contentment, satisfaction, and peace of mind. We should not much err, if we were to take this definition of happiness. Since it might easily be shown, that these several impressions upon the mind, of contentment, satisfaction, and peace, include the chief end and business of a rational creature; which is to fulfil the duty he owes to God, to his fellow-creatures, and to himself. And this is still to be reduced to one determination, or subject of consideration, and that is the duty which every rational creature owes to God. In proportion as this is kept in view, it is an in-

disputable truth, that men are more or less happy. And if any one principle, or axiom, can be thought to stand upon surer ground than another, it is this; that there is no happiness, where there is disobedience to the will and laws of our Creator.

Happiness may admit of different degrees — but it is not an ideal or an imaginary object. No person can persuade himself that he is happy, if he is really not so. His mind, or his conscience will soon show him the truth. And if he is deficient in the qualities or circumstances that compose happiness — if he is pursuing a course of life — if he is in the habit of practices that have a tendency to destroy his contentment, his satisfaction and peace of mind, no powers of argument can prove that he is happy.

If a glutton, or a drunkard, or a gamester, or a thief — if the covetous and avaricious — if the envious, the proud, or the ambitious, if the tyrant or the debauchee, were to tell me they were happy — I confess I could no otherwise believe them, than by being convinced that they had ceased to be rational creatures. That is, I should be convinced that their understanding was totally perverted, and that they had lost all sight of reason and reflection. I appeal to your own reflections for the truth and reasonableness of these observations. And they will lead me to consider the nature of that wisdom which is so frequently and so highly extolled in the Holy Scriptures, and to which the Apostle alludes in my text. "If any "of you lack wisdom, let him ask of "God."

If happiness is the chief end, and the natural pursuit of a rational creature, his wisdom will be shown in adopting the surest methods to obtain it.

Now it wants no argument to prove that sin is the destruction of happiness. And it is on this account, that in so many parts of Scripture, the good only are said to be wise — and are called the children of light — and that the wicked are called fools, and ranked among the sons of darkness. And it will be found that wisdom is at as great a distance from impiety, irreligion, and vice, as these are from happiness.

I have still further to premise, that the wisdom which I am about to recommend, is distinct from knowledge. A man may

be a prodigy in what is called learning or literature — he may be an adept in all sciences, and in all languages, he may possess all the accomplishments and acquirements of polished life; and yet be as far from deserving the name or the character of a wise man, as the most untutored inhabitant of the desart. If such qualities as I have mentioned are not accompanied with wisdom to direct the use of them, they are as often pernicious as serviceable. The wisdom then of a rational creature, will be displayed in that disposition of mind — that degree of sense, which shall induce him to covet those gifts or endowments, which will be most likely to be of service to him in that rank or station in life, in which, I shall say, nature has placed him — and in turning those gifts or endowments to the great-

est advantage. Wisdom therefore is not confined to any particular rank or station, or to any particular description of men. All have it in their power, and have a right, to consult the means of their own happiness, as much as all are naturally inclined to do so. And in this respect, the lowest member of society may show as much wisdom, as the highest potentate. There is in this case, "no respect of per-" sons with God." "If any of you lack " wisdom, let him ask of God: who " giveth to all men liberally, and upbraid-" eth not: and it shall be given him. But " let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." Let him ask with a full and implicit belief and confidence in the wisdom and mercy of his Creator — let him recollect, and be assured, that in applying to God, he is applying to the only sure source of all hap-

piness, and of all wisdom — of every thing truly desirable or serviceable. "Every "good gift, and every perfect gift," says the same apostle, "is from above, and "cometh down from the Father of Lights; "with whom is no variableness, neither "shadow of turning."

There is another consideration not to be omitted, and that is, that the happiness of this present life is immediately connected with that which we hope to enjoy in a life to come. The same causes or conduct which will produce happiness here upon earth, will establish our hopes of everlasting happiness in the Kingdom of God and of Heaven. One is emblematical of the other. And thus we may in many ways adopt the remark of St. Paul who speaks of persons and "things on earth that serve

" unto the example and shadow of " heavenly things." (Heb. viii. 5.)

Considering then how utterly dependent we are upon God, and that no one action of our lives that is contrary to his nature and will, can be productive of happiness, but will assuredly act as a bar to it; I trust it will be acknowledged, that the wisdom of man consists in his religious obedience — or in other words, in his obedience to God's holy word. " Behold," said the great and inspired law-giver of the Israelites, " I have taught you statutes " and judgments, as the Lord my God " commanded me, that ye should do so in " the land whither ye go to possess it. " Keep therefore and do them: for this is " your wisdom and your understanding in " the sight of the nations which shall hear

" all these statutes, and say, surely this " great nation is a wise and understanding " people." (Deut. iv. 5, 6.) It is the keeping the commandments of God, which is represented throughout the Scriptures, as the criterion of man's wisdom. And I am persuaded, that the proper use of reason and reflection, will oblige us to concur with this determination. The Scriptures, which contain the commandments, and the will of God towards mankind, " are " able," as St. Paul observes, " to make " us wise unto salvation." (2 Tim. iii. 15.) And he only deserves the name of a wise man, who keeps this end of his being in view. Show me any happiness or any wisdom that is unconnected with this great and material object, and I will venture to give up all that has been said, or that can be said upon the subject. Let the Scrip-

tures themselves be judged by the same rule, particularly, I will say, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent Epistles of his chosen and inspired Apostles. And if a direct and implicit obedience to them, will not produce all the happiness that a human being is capable of enjoying; if they will not lay the foundation for contentment, and satisfaction, and peace of mind, throughout the passage of life, and in the trying and awful visitation of death, it must now, at this moment, remain for the wisdom and subtilty of man alone, to devise a superior source of comfort. I say at this moment, because hitherto, the powers and conceits of men have utterly failed in this respect. "The wisdom of "the world," in this case, is truly said to be, "foolishness with God." And it was to this spirit and influence of the Scrip-

tures in general, and in particular of the Gospel, that I meant to turn your attention at present.

Let us look then to every possible state and condition of man. The high and the low — the learned and unlearned — the rich, and the poor — the prince and the peasant; let us take in the eventual accidents and contingences of life, to which the whole race of mankind is liable — and let us see if the Gospel of Christ will not afford instruction to each, the best suited in every possible way to his particular exigency — and such as will enable him to fulfil his duty, as I have already observed, to God, to his fellow-creatures, and to himself. It is by a rule of conduct such as this alone, I must repeat, that wisdom can be displayed, or happiness obtained.

The despiser of God and of religion can know nothing of the peace and happiness appropriate to a reasonable being. The openly wicked and abandoned must be strangers to any thing like peace and tranquillity of mind. The secretly vicious are taking the sure road to destroy the peace of others as well as of themselves. These are truths so substantiated by every day's experience, that they require no argument to prove them. How appositely therefore did the Apostle exhort the Romans, when he wrote to them, "I would have "you wise unto that which is good, and "simple — ακεραιους — innocent, concern- "ing evil." (ch. xvi. 19.) And although there may be a peculiar wisdom, requisite for the management of peculiar circum stances — yet in them all it will be easy to perceive a distinction between what is

good, and what is evil — between what is salutary, and what is noxious — between that which has a tendency to secure happiness, and that which will infallibly produce the contrary. In the Scriptures, the monarch is instructed to rule without tyranny and oppression, and is taught that he can only fulfil *his* duty, by studying the welfare and happiness of his subjects. The subject may there learn the necessity of obedience without abject servility — the intoxicating love of liberty even is admitted, so long as it be not suffered to deviate into licentiousness. In the Scriptures, the distressed and afflicted may find, upon every occasion, an alleviating remedy in that reliance which they are there taught and exhorted to place in the wisdom, mercy, and truth, of their Almighty Creator and Redeemer.

In short, there is no one rank, or condition, or situation in the life of man, either with respect to this present state of existence, or to another, to which the religion of Christ will not apply the sure means of attaining happiness. Nor is any thing more apparent than St. Paul's assertion in his Epistle to Timothy — that, "all Scrip- "ture is given by inspiration of God, and "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for "correction, for instruction in righteous- "ness; that the man of God may be per- "fect, thoroughly furnished unto all good "works." (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.) Such, I am thoroughly convinced, is the spirit of the Gospel, or of Christ's religion. And wherever, or in whatever degree, its influence is seen to fail, we may be as readily convinced that the cause of such failure is in mankind, and not in the doctrine.

From these few reflections, we may come to the conclusion, that since our present and future state of existence are so undeniably connected, as that one will decide the fate of the other — the wisdom of a reasonable creature will be proved by his making his religious obedience and his worldly occupations go hand in hand together. "The wisdom of the prudent," says Solomon, "is to understand his "way." (Prov. xiv. 8.) To be thoroughly persuaded, whatever be his calling or his line of life, that he is doing right, and that so he is fulfilling his duty to God, and securing the eternal happiness of his soul. This is the wisdom, of which the same wise king remarks in his inimitable book of Proverbs, "She is more precious than "rubies, and all the things thou canst "desire, are not to be compared unto her.

" Length of days is in her right hand, and " in her left hand riches and honour. " Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and " all her paths are peace. She is a tree " of life to them that lay hold upon her, " and happy is every one that retaineth " her." (ch. iii. 15, &c. &c.) What then is *your* wisdom? let me ask, — to put the matter in as clear a point of view as possible. It is to make your whole life subservient to your salvation. It is to direct all your knowledge, and all your acquirements, to this one most material and most important object. And how are you to obtain this wisdom? Not by the whole force of your own intellectual powers, independent of the power and will of God. " If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask " of God," — in whose sight, upon this occasion, and indeed upon every occasion

where salvation is considered, all men are equal — "let him ask of God, who giveth "to all men liberally, and upbraideth "not, and it shall be given him." In this instance, "if any man among you," says St. Paul, "seemeth to be wise in this "world, let him become a fool, that he "*may be* wise." (1 Cor. iii. 18.) Let him give up the vain philosophy of the world — and throw himself upon the direction of that omnipotent wisdom that is infallible, and that cannot err. Let him not imagine that he can frame any laws or regulations for himself, distinct from the undeniable revelation of God's will. Let him not suppose that he can mark out a path-way to happiness and to immortality, in opposition to that which is stampt with the seal of perfection and truth. "The scorner," says Solomon, "seeketh wisdom, and

" findeth it not." (Prov. xiv. 5.) The infidel and skeptic increases his own difficulties. The utmost efforts of human philosophy are chimerical, when compared with that light which shines forth in the Gospel. " Whence then," as Job asks, " cometh wisdom? And where is the " place of understanding? seeing it is hid " from the eyes of all living, and kept " close from the fowls of the air. De- " struction and death say, we have heard " of the fame thereof with our ears." The answer is, " God understandeth the way " thereof, and He knoweth the place of it. " And unto man He said, behold, the fear " of the Lord, *that* is wisdom, and to de- " part from evil is understanding." (Job. xxviii. 20, &c.) If I have been so happy as to have expressed myself clearly upon this subject; if upon turning it in your

minds, you should be convinced that the wisdom of man consists in his fulfilment of the laws of Heaven, and in the pursuit of a happy eternity—if you are persuaded that the Gospel of Christ affords the means of obtaining this wisdom, and of securing happiness both present and future—If you will for a moment consider how truly and closely the conduct of every individual is connected with the community at large, and in how great a degree the prosperity and happiness of society depends upon the prevalence of piety and virtue; you will not withdraw that benevolent provision which you now for some time have afforded for the instruction of the poor children in your neighbourhood. You will not withhold the means which that provision has put in their hands of learning their duty to God, to each other,

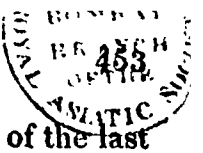
and to themselves. If it were nothing more than the habituating them to a regular attendance upon a place of worship, the benefit would be sufficiently evident. But I am persuaded that the usefulness of our Sunday-school, and of every Sunday-school has been of much greater extent than that. The effects of reading the Scriptures, and of hearing those exhortations which are made from them from time to time, will most probably remain through life; and become productive of fruits highly to the credit and satisfaction of those who have laid so desirable a foundation. You are not to expect that the same improvement will be made equally in all, or that in some, your present endeavours may not be wholly frustrated. But it must be allowed that the intention is good, and that much and manifest good

has been produced by it. It is a real pleasure to behold several in this Church, who I am persuaded, have been inclined and enabled to exercise their devotion in the most becoming manner, by the help and influence of that institution, of which I am now speaking. I might finish the subject by observing that it is a folly to expect the common virtues of honesty, of sobriety, of decency, and chastity, among any set of people, but in proportion as they have the means of religious and moral instruction put in their power. I might say, in the words of an excellent divine,* with regard to many of those children, who are now the objects of our contemplation — they must be supported, they must be attended to, they must be

* Jortin.

instructed — or, they must be undone. And I trust, and pray, that any thing more which I might be enabled to say, may be deemed unnecessary. Yet, let me be permitted to add one suggestion — which is — that I think our plan might perhaps have been better conducted, and might still be improved, if some of those who hear me, could be induced to bestow some attention upon it beyond their pecuniary assistance. I am persuaded that by this means it might be greatly ameliorated, if not saved from falling into neglect. Such attention would be exceedingly grateful and stimulating to the immediate objects, and I am sure highly gratifying to those who bestowed it.

I am sorry to remark, that there is



scarcely a sufficiency remaining of the last year's subscription to answer the immediate calls upon us. But I trust that your liberality will make up the deficiency. And that as the School necessarily and unavoidably admits the children of three neighbouring parishes, the inhabitants of those parishes will readily contribute to its support. It is no enthusiasm to hope, that endowments of this kind, will, among others of a charitable nature, prove our wisdom as a Christian nation. And God grant that "we may be filled with the "knowledge of his will, in all wisdom "and spiritual understanding. That we "may walk worthy of the Lord unto all "pleasing; being fruitful in every good "work, and increasing in the knowledge "of God." (Col. i. 9, 10.) To whom be

all glory, might, majesty, and dominion, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, now and for ever.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.


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Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018